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JUNE 1, 1926

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

TWICE A MONTH

BEGINNING

"STILL WITHIN the LAW"

By Bayard Veiller

Author of
"WITHIN THE LAW"
"THE THIRTEENTH CHAIR" etc.

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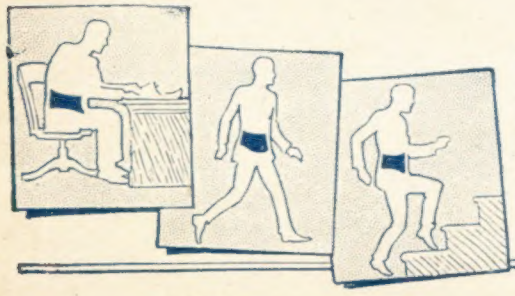

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ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

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Around the Corner

NOTHING is more fascinating than that which is partially hidden, particularly if it is hidden just enough to make its true identity a matter for the shrewdest kind of speculation. Suggestion, as everyone knows, is infinitely more attractive than either complete obscurity or the naked truth and a mystery that hovers on the brink of solution, with the truth momentarily on the verge of becoming altogether apparent to everyone—this kind of mystery is just the sort to make one sit on the edge of one's chair until the whole story is told.

Just such a mystery story as this begins in our next issue—on the stands June 15. It is called THE MURILLO MYSTERY, and its author is Beulah Poynter, whose mystery stories need no introduction to the reading public.

An entirely different sort of story is THE CRIMSON ROBE, by Elizabeth Herrick, and it is just this difference in the contents of every issue of MYSTERY MAGAZINE that makes it really worth while.

Alice Brady, starring in "The Bride of the Lamb," supplies our next issue's true mystery story with Bide Dudley presiding at the typewriter.

And Dale Collins comes back with another PETER LAMB story called THE ADVENTURE OF ADVENTURES.

These and other features that are altogether in keeping with the standard MYSTERY MAGAZINE has set for itself, lift our June 15 issue a little nearer to the height its editors would like the magazine to attain and keep.

The Night Out

By F. TENNYSON JESSE

A Complete Novelette

CHAPTER I.

THE BEST OF ILLUSIONS

MARTIN came back after seeing the last of his two guests to the door to find Palliser puffing serenely and gazing into the clear fire, which was more of an ornament than a necessity on that warm October night.

Martin sat down on the other side of the hearth and filled his pipe, and they puffed in silence for a few minutes; then Martin began to feel more and more that some urgency of Palliser's thought was enveloping him, insisting on his attention. He shifted his feet, coughed, examined his pipe and finally heard himself saying: "Well?"

"Being married tomorrow, aren't you?" asked Palliser. Martin nodded. "Pleased about it? But I needn't ask. You have all the stigmata."

"You can't laugh me out of it—yes."

"That's all right," said Palliser. "After all, it's the best of the illusions."

"It's the only thing that isn't an illusion!" declared Martin.

"I'm not sure you believe that," observed Palliser. "I suppose you're certain that you've captured this strange thing called Love; that you are incapable, well armored as you are, of any disloyalty, let us say?"

"I think I can be sure of that," said Martin quietly.

"What is disloyalty?" asked Palliser with a little shrug. "Oh, I don't want to disturb you, Martin, but if you imagine that your feet are set on a safe way, you're extremely mistaken. To ninety-nine people out of a hundred it might be possible to live in blinkers, but not to you. You *know*, Martin!"

Again, as once before at dinner, his light fanatical eyes met Martin's and again Martin had that strange sense of unreality and again the words "real, and "unreal" chased through his head.

It's like the trial in "Alice in Wonderland," he thought to himself, when the White King kept on writing down "Important — Unimportant — Important."

After all, there's nothing you can't make seem absurd if you think about it enough. It's only by not thinking that any of us can get along.

Palliser was watching him curiously.

"You're too young to have some of the notions you have, Martin," he said. "How old are you? Only just thirty? It's the war, I suppose. But never mind; you're none the worse for not seeing things in black and white like that fool Garberry!"

Palliser had risen and was reaching out for his shabby overcoat as he spoke. Living as he did for years of his life in the tropics, Palliser always came home to the most old-fashioned of warm clothes which were kept in store during his absence, and reeked of camphor when he wore them again.

"Don't help me," he said, waving

Martin away. "I smell like a prevented moth!"

"I'll come out with you," said Martin; "I want a breath of fresh air."

To himself he was thinking: I believe I've drunk too much—my head feels rotten. What a silly ass I am!

They went down the narrow old stairs together and across the courtyard where the withered leaves were dropping from the plane trees.

"I suppose," said Martin as they walked toward the Strand, "that you get all sorts of hanky-panky in the East?"

"The rope trick?"

Palliser smiled sardonically.

"No, I don't mean glorified conjuring tricks; I mean the real thing."

"And you call it 'hanky-panky!'" murmured Palliser. "Oh, yes, there are queer things out there but they're not on the surface, you know. A man might live all his life out in the East and never discover anything more than that the people drive a hard bargain and fleece the stranger within their gates.

"To say the East is the place for mystics is rather like saying the West is the place for sailormen and then expect every man you meet in London to be hitching up his tarry breeks."

THEY were in Fleet Street by now and a taxi came crawling up. Palliser hailed it and, after giving a direction to the driver, paused with his foot on the step to say a last word to Martin.

"You haven't asked me to your wedding tomorrow," he said, "but I shall be there. So long, Martin."

He got in and slammed the door and the taxi moved away, leaving deserted Fleet Street bare and silent beneath the starry sky.

Martin stood and felt the fresh wind—sweet as though it blew from a country land—across his brow. He was suddenly seized with the feeling that he should not be able to sleep if he went back to his rooms and he stood hesitating a moment on the pavement.

Another taxi turned into Fleet Street from Chancery Lane and came slowly toward him. He hailed it almost before he knew what he was doing.

CHAPTER II.

THE RIGHT MAN

THE taxi was shut, but he could always have it opened later, and he felt he would like to go up to Hampstead Heath and get some fresh air into his lungs. He gave the direction to the driver, opened the door and stepped in.

As he did so, the taxi started off with a jerk and he was thrown violently forward. His hands touched a person sitting in the far corner of the back seat, and for a moment he had a shock of pure irrational horror, so unexpected was the contact.

The next moment he had fallen back onto the seat for the driver had slammed the door and the taxi was traveling at a good rate of speed.

Martin had opened his mouth to stammer his surprised excuses when a sudden awful thought struck him. The person, whoever he or she was, had not moved or made a sign at his unexpected onslaught.

For the moment he had the horrible sensation of being in the taxi with a corpse.

Before he could hit on the window to arrest the driver in his wild career a soft, anxious voice said to him:

"You are not hurt, I hope? The chauffeur was too sudden."

A wave of relief flooded Martin's being. Just then they slowed down under the light of a street lamp and he caught a passing glimpse of large

dark eyes and a pale face, and a mouth so deeply red it seemed as dark as the eyes.

"I am quite all right, thank you," said Martin; "but what a perfect fool this man is! Of course I thought he was free or I should never have hailed him!"

The lady gave a sad little laugh, that was more like a sob.

"That was my doing," she said. "I made him keep his flag up. I was looking for someone. I saw you standing alone, at a loose end as you call it, so I just chanced your being the right man."

"The right man?" asked Martin.

"The right man to help me!"

The charming voice had lost its lightness. He could detect a note of tragedy in it now.

"I am in great trouble. That is why I am out tonight like this. I am looking for somebody to help me."

The taxi was now whizzing ahead at a great pace and Martin began to feel very annoyed. He was sorry if this charming looking lady was in trouble but it was not any affair of his, and, far from getting any fresh air, he was almost stifled for both the windows were up and the lady used a rather strong scent.

The taxi was doubling in and out of side-streets so fast that Martin had not only lost all sense of direction but was beginning to feel rather giddy.

"If you would rather get out," said the lady, with a sob in her voice, "please say so. I do not want you to help me against your will, but, after all, I shall only take up a little of your time—and oh! I am in such trouble!" and she burst into tears.

This is awful! thought Martin as he patted consolingly a pair of clinging little hands that reached out toward him. What am I to do? Aloud, he said, feeling his own inadequacy:

"Nonsense! Anything I can do, of course. Wont you tell me what the trouble is?"

The lady wept into her handkerchief which she pulled out of a little bag, and the overpowering scent grew stronger than ever.

"How good you are!" she sobbed. "Somehow I knew directly I caught sight of you in Fleet Street that you were the sort of man that one could rely on."

WELL, thought Martin, I mayn't know much, but I do know enough to be afraid when I'm told that by a woman! Aloud he said:

"Tell me what it is, anyway. I'm afraid I shan't be much good, but I'll have a shot at it."

"A shot!" The lady started. "Oh, I see—it is what you call an idiom."

"You are not English?"

He had already guessed as much from the too perfect way in which the lady pronounced her words and also from something exotic and strange in that passing glimpse of her when the taxi had slowed up under the street lamp.

"I am Czecho-Slovakian," she answered.

While Martin was feverishly trying to think of the right answer—he could not for the life of him think whether you congratulated or condoled with a person upon being a Czecho-Slovakian—she added eagerly:

"Of course you sympathize more with the Yugo-Slavs, but I assure you there is much to be said for us that you have probably never heard!"

"I'm sure of that," said Martin, "and, personally, I'm not conscious of any violent sympathy with the Yugo-Slavs, though I dare say I'm wrong. And meanwhile I'm only waiting for a reason to put all my sympathies at the disposal of a Czecho-Slovakian."

The taxi was threading its way through very dark streets now and Martin began to wonder whether he had not been the world's most almighty fool not to have let down the window before now and shouted to the driver that he must stop.

Suddenly the brakes came on with a rough grinding, heart-breaking to any lover of a motor, and the taxi rocked to a standstill.

"Here we are," said the lady. "This is my home. Please, oh, please come in! I cannot tell you anything out here."

Well, thought Martin, I may as well get out of the taxi anyway, and he stepped out of the cab.

They were in a dark and narrow lane with warehouses on one side and on the other a high wall, at a narrow door in which they had stopped. The lady already had her hand on the latch and was opening it.

In the light from the taxi lamps Martin could see that her head was dark and very sleek and that she was wrapped in a silver tissue cloak that hid the whole of her except her thin, flesh-colored ankles and her narrow silver slippers.

She pushed the door open and beckoned him to follow her, but he hesitated.

He glanced at the taxi-driver, who was sitting hunched up over his wheel and the only part of whose face that was visible was a round red cheek and the outstanding bristle of a large dark nustache.

"You can keep the cab," she mocked at him. "That will make you feel safer!"

"Wait a minute!" said Martin, and he took out his little pocketbook and made a note of the number of the cab.

He put back his pencil, snapped the elastic band around his pocketbook again and followed the lady through the little door.

It was very dark in that enclosed garden, but the path was smooth and straight and he followed the form of the lady shimmering faintly in front of him, until she said suddenly: "Take care, there is a little step up here!"

And he found himself on what he imagined to be a veranda. He heard the sound of a key in a lock and the next moment the door swung open and he saw into a rather dingy hall covered with paneling that had once been white and that still retained its gracious proportions.

"Shut the door quietly behind you," she whispered, "and come upstairs, but don't make a noise!"

With a resigned sigh he did as she bade him and followed her up stairs covered with nothing more romantic than oil-cloth. An uncovered gas-jet burned in the hall and lighted the first floor and stairs.

She led him up the second and darker flight and, throwing open the door, she went into a completely dark room. She asked him to strike a match and when he did so she motioned to him to light the gas. The flame flickered and swelled in the chandelier, giving a loud pop, and then continuing to hiss quietly after the manner of its kind.

CHAPTER III.

FUTILE AND HELPLESS

MARTIN looked around the room. The white radiance of the incandescent gas lit up fully the face of the strange lady and he found himself staring at her in a strange amazement.

He had caught a glimpse in the taxi-cab of a face that was beautifully proportioned, dark eyes and dark mouth set in perfect relationship to each other, but the searching

gas-light could find no flaw in the texture of her skin.

She was beautiful with that complete beauty that men imagine but may not see until the end of their days.

Her smooth black hair was taken straight back in the modern fashion that lends no assistance of softening curls to a faulty outline, and her profile, clear, white and clean as a simitar, lifted into the harsh brilliance without a glimmer of distrust in its own perfection.

Beneath her low brow, where the black hair grew in a widow's peak, her dark eyes had something Eastern in their full lids that curled up slightly at each end.

Her nose was so good as to be negligible, as noses should be, and she had one of those mouths which look as though they had been put on from the outside.

She was thin with the thinness of a carved ivory statuette; a thinness that gave no hint of bones, but only seemed to suggest lightness of structure. She looked like a princess out of the Arabian Nights; and that she understood her type only too well, without the adequate knowledge to express it, was plain by the cheap "Eastern" scent with which she had drenched herself.

The silver tissue coat which she had dropped upon a particularly hideous red plush chair, and her frock also of silver tissue, looked all right to Martin's eyes, but he was incapable in that first minute of anything but the blaze of admiration that her beauty lit in his mind.

It was so triumphant, so unassailable, that that one minute had wiped out environment and circumstances.

Then he became aware that quite quietly, without any noise or fuss, large tears were slipping off those long lashes and running down those pale, beautifully modeled cheeks, and he received an impression of true desolation, all the more complete for that uncomplaining quietness.

They stood staring at each other, inarticulate, while the moment closed about them like a sphere of elfish intimacy.

"Wont you light the gas-fire?" she asked him. "It is rather cold, don't you think?"

Her words were like the shattering of crystal and the magic broke from around them. Martin lit the fire as he was bid, and then still standing—she had curled herself up at one end of a hideous sofa—he asked:

"What can I do to help you?"

She looked at a little diamond watch upon her wrist.

"It's nearly one o'clock," she answered. "Stay here with me for an hour and you will have helped me more than you can possibly tell."

Martin stared at her incredulously.

"You are making a fool of me," he said roughly, "you have hold of the wrong man; I am not out for that sort of thing, thank you!" and he moved toward the door.

She did not move and for the first time her eyes narrowed with mirth.

"You cannot get out," she observed gently. "I have locked the door and I have the key."

He shook the door handle, but it was as she had said. The door was old and solid and to have attempted to break it down would have been foolish as long as he could get out by any other means. He went toward the window and, pulling aside the curtains, threw it up.

Clouds of dense white fog blew softly into the room like steam and the sound of a ship's siren suddenly stabbed the silence with four indignant blasts.

"We are close by the river!" cried Martin, swinging around.

She nodded. "Yes, this is our house, built over our wharf."

"Our own house," repeated Martin, "whose?"

"My husband's and mine, or rather, I suppose I should say, my husband's. This is a river fog; they come up quickly like that, thick and white as cotton-wool."

MARTIN slammed down the window again and came toward her. There was something threatening in his approach, but she remained so unafraid that his anger seemed to him futile and helpless.

With a swift movement she was on her feet and standing close up to him.

"You're thinking bad things of me. You think I'm playing with you. I'm not, I swear it. I'm in dreadful trouble and only you can help me. And even you can only help me by staying here for an hour. See—you may go over to the chair on the other side of the fireplace. You need not sit anywhere near me if you are afraid of me."

"I'm not in the least afraid," Martin assured her, and, to prove it he sat down on the red plush sofa beside her. "May I smoke?" he asked.

"But yes—I should have offered you one of mine."

She fumbled eagerly in her vanity bag.

"I think I'll have one of my own, thank you."

He lit up and, leaning back, studied her through the clouds of smoke that he puffed out.

Seen thus close and in the searching light of the gas, her pallor and her sadness and that strange sense of anxiety which informed her whole being, became more apparent than before.

She was smoking, too, though she had refused one of his Gold Flakes, and she sat looking away from him, her eyes down-drooped and her amazing lashes curling blackly against her high, delicately modeled cheek-bone.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM A REMOTE PAST

"TELL me about yourself," she said suddenly. "Not who you are if you would rather not, but what your ambitions are—whether you are in love; what your life has been like."

"My life, like that of most men of my age, has been largely swallowed up by the war. I'm engaged to be married"—why did those words suddenly seem to startle him and to echo as though from a remote past? —"and my ambition, if you will excuse me saying so, is to get home to bed as soon as possible."

"You will stay a little longer?" she begged.

"I'd stay a great deal longer if I thought you were in any trouble that I could help, or if you would tell me honestly what it is you want of me."

Again she looked at her watch and then she lifted her head and seemed to be listening, delicately, as a bird listens, as though she might hear sounds inaudible to his grosser ears.

"My friend, I will tell you one thing," she said at last. "In an hour you will know not only all the things that you have asked me but a great many other things as well. In an hour you will have solved the riddle of the Universe."

Martin stared at her and for a moment a chill hand seemed to close about his heart; there was something so sad about the cadence of her voice. As though she saw his moment of panic, she smiled reassuringly at him and suddenly the tragedy seemed to fall away from her face and she became a laughing child.

It was as though by some incredibly quick sleight-of-hand a tragic

mask had been replaced by one depicting comedy. She drew her feet up under her on the sofa and wriggled herself more comfortably into her corner.

"You will have to trust me for an hour," she declared gaily. "Forget how strangely we met and think that you are just a nice English gentleman making polite conversation to a lady who need not altogether bore you."

"At two o'clock I shall have to take my leave. Is that understood?"

She pouted at him and again for a moment behind the pretty childish pretense of a spoilt woman expressed in the gesture, he saw stark fear looking out of her eyes.

"At two o'clock, or a few minutes after, you will be free," she promised him.

"Very well, then," said Martin gaily. "Now what shall we talk about?"

"Ourselves, of course."

"You begin, then," said Martin. "I'm a very dull subject, I assure you."

SHE glanced at him oddly and it seemed to him there was a queer sort of tenderness in her look, a sort of compunction.

"No, you are not dull," she said, "but you shall have your own way. I will tell you about myself; about when I was a little girl."

She began to talk softly and gently with a delightful if sometimes an unusual choice of words, and Martin found himself forgetting his crude surroundings. He felt as though he were wandering with her, a strange little girl with large dark eyes and long thin legs, over the mountainside by the village of her birth, where the air was clear and heady and the carpet of pine needles smelled strong and sweet in the sunshine.

Then she was a young girl in the pre-war Vienna—that laughing, careless, warm-hearted happy-go-lucky Vienna that the war had killed.

She talked eagerly of simple pleasures, of the delicious things they had had to eat—*Apfelstrudel; Zwieback; salami*—the little *Keks* wrapped in brightly colored paper.

He found himself recognizing that he too in his childhood had had the same strange thoughts and perplexities that had agitated her. One thing in especial that she said went straight to the heart of his own memories.

"I went through phases as a child," she said. "I expect all imaginative children do. There were months when I could not walk on the cracks between the flagstones, or months when I had to touch every third railing in passing; and then there was a phase which was like a nightmare to me, when I was about nine.

"While I was going through it I was obsessed by a terrible fear that I was the only live person, really live person, in the world; that everyone else was only the similitude of a person painted to deceive me.

"I remember once I was walking along in the suburb of Vienna where I was at school, with my English governess, and we were passing prim little tidy villas with balustrades and gables and plate glass windows, and I stood still and looked around upon everything, amazed because it all seemed so real. Everything was very bright in the sun; points of light flashed from the windows and from the shiny leaves of the hedges.

"It looked so real you thought it must have been standing there always and it would always go on existing. My governess, who was dressed in blue serge, was walking just a little ahead of me and her back looked so real, too—so flat and hard—and I took out a pin and drove it suddenly into her back because I so wanted to know whether she really

did exist or whether I was all alone on the face of the earth.

"Of course there were the most dreadful scenes and when I tried to explain why I had done it, it made things no better.

" 'You are a very conceited little girl to think you are the only real person,' she said to me.

"But it was not conceit, it was fear, an awful dread; I felt it here."

And she laid her slim hand on her breast.

"I know!" said Martin quickly. "I felt like that once when I was a kid. It's funny—I remember the leaves on the hedge I was passing. Mine was a holly hedge and I remember thinking it looked as though it had been cut out of tin."

"Did you stick a pin into somebody, too?"

"No, but I wanted to."

"Why did you not?"

"I realized it would do no good. If they made a fuss and yelled and shrieked and swore they were real it wouldn't really have helped me. I should only have thought: 'Of course they have to behave like this to keep up the pretence. It's all part of the great plot.' You see one couldn't have told that their indignation and their pain was any more real than anything else about them."

"Ah, you were a philosopher even then," she said, "and I was an experimenter. Have you always been cautious?"

"About what?"

"About what you have done and how you have done it."

MARTIN defended himself against the charge of caution and from that went on to a little dissertation about the principles that ordered his life.

She listened with a beautiful warm interest that seemed to glow up through her pale exterior like a white flame. They talked on—or rather, their thoughts answered each other so swiftly and with such completeness that Martin was hardly conscious of the actual employment of the medium of words.

A strange contentment, almost a drowsiness, began to steal over his body while his mind remained clear and alive but heedless of actual material surroundings. The whiteness of the paneled walls ceased to distract him.

They might have been the soft green of his own room, and there was even a strange little moment when this beautiful lady, at once so pale and so dark, compact of moonlight and its shadows, seemed to have a look of Mira—dear day-time Mira with her glowing hair.

Ridiculous! Of course, they were totally unalike, but there had been for that instant some turn of cheek or neck, some little lift of the lip or glance of the eye which had made him feel almost as though Mira were with him.

The moment was gone, and Mira sank away again from his consciousness.

He could not have told exactly when he knew that her name was Ilonka, but he knew that it sounded like the peal of a fairy bell and remembered vaguely that it had been one of his favorite names in a translation of some Hungarian fairy stories he had had as a little boy.

"Ilonka! Ilonka!"

Was he saying it aloud or only thinking it? She was leaning very close to him, but he had ceased to notice the too-strong perfume she used.

He had ceased to think about the strange fashion of his coming to this river-side house; he had forgotten his initial distrust of her. He was invaded by the bliss of this complete understanding which had never be-

fore been possible between him and any other human being.

Suddenly, the charmed circle which seemed to encircle them was violently broken by Ilonka herself. She glanced at the little watch on her wrist and sprang up; she stood for a moment with her hands clasped together against her breast, a look of wild distress upon her face.

For a moment she stood thus in a frozen immobility, that yet suggested action, an arrested action, as though she had been caught and turned to stone, with her gown blown by the wind of her swift movement; her eyes sublime with the fire of some strange flight.

The next instant she had, as it were, broken up and dissolved, and was in his arms, against his wildly-thumping heart.

"I can't bear it, I can't bear it," she wailed, "it is you I must save, after all; nobody matters but you!"

In that first tranced moment when his arms closed around her, he was too intoxicated by the flood of happiness that pervaded his whole being to feel amazed as to the cause of her panic. Then her words came pouring out, checking the questions that came to his lips.

"Oh! I thought I could do it and I find I can't. I have never met you before and yet you are the other half of me, you are me and I am you; don't you feel it so? And yet, I have brought you here to have you killed."

Then, indeed, a shock of horror raced through his nerves and he stood still, clutching her to him, as frozen into his attitude of caressing as she had been a minute earlier in hers of alert terror.

Within the circle of his rigid arms, she stood, her face almost touching his, their eyes staring at each other.

"Ah! don't hate me," she cried. "How can I tell you as quickly as I must, so that you will understand? Listen! My husband.... No! I can't stop to tell you now. It will be too late if I do. Go quickly. The back way will be the safest."

She began almost to push him out of the room.

"I'm damned if I'll go," said Martin. "Tell me what you mean. *Now.* Do you hear?"

CHAPTER V.

IT HAS HAPPENED!

SUDDENLY, she caught sight of the window, and as though the white density of the fog pressing against the panes were not sufficient protection, she ran toward it and feverishly pulled the curtains together.

"Why do you do that?" cried Martin.

She came flying back to him across the room with the beautiful urgency of a bird in her winged movement, her arms outstretched. Again she flung herself against his breast. As she did so, there came the sharp crack! crack! of firing from the garden down below.

For a moment she hung in his arms limp as if she had been wounded, but it was only from nervous shock. The window panes and curtain remained intact. The bullets, wherever they had sped, had not been fired into the room where she and Martin clung together.

A long cry of mortal anguish in a man's voice came from below. It reached a high note, and then shuddered away into silence—a silence so complete that Martin could feel the startled beating of his own heart in his ears.

"It has happened!" she breathed.

Then she seemed to spring to life out of his arms. Her whole body became infused with energy; her drooping lids lifted and her eyes blazed into his.

"I can save you, I can still save you," she said, speaking low and quickly.

Then she stopped as the sound of a heavy footfall was heard upon the stair. She stared frantically around the room and a gleam came into her eyes as they lit on the heavy curtains drawn across the window.

"You must go behind there, quick, at once!" she whispered and tried to drag him toward the window.

Martin was opening his mouth to protest, when, with a glance of purest terror toward the door, she pressed her hand over his lips, and her eyes beseeched him in such agonized fashion to do what she asked him that, like a man in a dream, he allowed himself to be pushed behind the heavy red plush curtain.

He had hardly done so before the door burst open and a man with a revolver in his hand stood glaring from the threshold.

During the minutes that followed, Martin felt as though he were in one of those nightmares in which the dreamer knows he is but dreaming and realizes that he has only to give a shout to free himself from the oppression of terror weighing upon him and yet is incapable of uttering a sound from a throat that seems dry and strangled.

He watched the man and the woman meet; heard them talking as though he himself were bound and gagged, an unwilling audience at a monstrous comedy.

The man who had entered so violently was a short thick-set fellow of swarthy complexion and foreign aspect. Gold earrings in his ears would have transformed him, in spite of his rather loud black-and-white check suit, into an ideal presentment of an old-time swashbuckler.

His white teeth flashed from his round, dark face; his great shoulders, short legs and powerful podgy hands all suggested a man of tremendous strength and of great violence, but of peasant origin.

He stared around the room with the same sort of stupid, thick suspicion in his lowering gaze that a bull might have had, and Ilonka stood facing him apparently unafraid, burning like a silver flame. She seemed to affright him in some queer manner as a fire frightens a wild beast.

For a moment they stood thus, he with lowered head that waved suspiciously from side to side, she tense and rigid. Then their positions broke, giving Martin a sensation of some tangible rupture as of some brittle substance that he could hear crackle and fall apart.

Ilonka sank upon the red sofa once more and the man who was so like a captured bull came slowly forward.

"So!" he said. "I have done what I told you, I have killed him."

He spoke, as Ilonka did, with a slight foreign accent, but his was more guttural than hers. Martin judged him to be Spanish or Portuguese, probably the latter.

ILONKA answered him calmly in a frozen voice that seemed to chill the violence of his rage.

"You say you have killed him," she said. "Of whom are you speaking?"

"I am speaking of your lover, shameless one. I have shot him in the garden as he was walking up and down outside the window waiting to be let in."

"You say you have shot my lover?" she replied contemptuously. "Did you stop to look at him? Is it a man you know? If not, how do you know whom you have shot? Why, it may have been a policeman who came to see if the windows were fastened properly; it may have been one of your own friends waiting to speak to you as you came in.

"I have heard nothing up here. If it had been my lover, should I not have heard him? Would he not have clung to me? I warn you, Pedro, you have made a great mistake."

The man stood still, staring at her, and, with the suspicion on his face, there mingled the first beginnings of doubt which sat with an odd pathos on his blunt countenance.

"You didn't look at him!" she cried. "You got an idea into your bull's head that I am having an assignation with a lover and that is enough for you. You waylay an innocent man and murder him—yes, murder him—and you don't even look to see who it is."

Pedro passed his thick finger around the inside of his collar as though to ease his breathing which had become hurried and uneven.

"Of course the man was your lover," he said, but the confidence had gone out of his voice. "What else should he have been doing here at this hour, waiting outside the window?"

Ilonka shrugged her shoulders and turned away from him as though tired of the discussion.

"How should I know?" she asked. "You have many strange people who come here to see you, Pedro."

WITH a roar of fury Pedro turned and made for the door, and the next moment Martin heard him hurrying down the stairs.

He slipped quickly through the curtains so that his shape should not be seen from the garden and, closing them behind him, stood holding them together with one hand behind his back while he gazed at Ilonka questioningly.

"Well, my poor friend," she observed, "it has happened. What a mess, eh? At this moment Pedro is probably striking matches to discover who it is he has killed."

"Do you know who it is?" asked Martin.

"It is his oldest friend," she answered casually, "Alonzo de Castro."

"How do you know who it is?" asked Martin slowly.

"Because I was expecting him; that is why I brought you here."

She broke off and going to the door she listened a moment.

"It is all right," she said, coming back, "I expect he is weeping over Alonzo's body by now."

Her callousness was so complete it ceased to shock. It was as though a being not human were speaking; her voice had an elfin lightness that made her words unearthly. She closed the door and came quickly up to Martin, and as she did so the unhuman quality fell away from her and she was once again a living, breathing, and apparently a loving woman.

"He will be back in a minute," she said urgently, her voice low and warm and throbbing with anxiety for Martin's safety. "You must come in here and stay hidden till I tell you you can come out."

She began to pull him across the room to a door half hidden by a crimson portière in the far corner. Martin stopped her.

"I don't stir from this room," he said brusquely, "until you tell me what it is all about, and if that fat murderer comes in again and tries any of his games on me, I shall knock him down and go for the police."

He expected her to cry and protest, to hang about him. Instead, she dropped his arm and stood looking at him with her face dimpling to a smile. Her eyes crinkled up and became shining slits in the manner he already knew and that so pleased him. She clasped her hands together under her chin like a delighted child.

"You are splendid," she breathed. "That is how I like a man to talk.

Ah! if only Alonzo had been like you!"

"Alonzo?" said Martin. "Do you really mean to tell me the poor devil is dead?"

"Oh yes, Pedro is a crack shot. You see, last night, when Pedro was asleep, Alonzo came into the garden and I was just whispering to him out of the window when Pedro woke up. He was very cunning and didn't let me know at once that he was awake, and he heard me say 'Tomorrow night, then.'

"He jumped out of bed and came roaring at me, but I had time to call to Alonzo to warn him and by the time Pedro's head was out of the window, Alonzo had gone through the garden gate. However, of course it made Pedro very suspicious, and he made a scene.

"He had to go out the first part of night on one of his business errands down the river, but instead, he swore he would come back and catch my lover.

"He had to go out the first part of the night. I can't tell you his business, for if he found it out he would kill me; but he said he would get back by two. That didn't help me, for it was at two o'clock Alonzo was coming."

"Why didn't you send word to him not to come?" asked Martin.

"I could not. Pedro has never left me; you don't know what it has been like. All day long he has stood glowering at me. We have only one servant who leaves in the evening. Pedro told her I was ill and brought me in my meals to my room, himself.

"Then when he went out at eleven tonight, I tore out to the telephone and tried to find Alonzo, but I could not succeed. I was in despair; then I had a good idea——

"I thought I would go into town and see if I could not find someone to bring home. If only Alonzo arrived within a few moments before Pedro, I could call to him from the window and tell him to hide in the garden. Then Pedro would come up here and find a strange man with me and kill him instead of killing Alonzo, so I should still have my lover left to me and Pedro would never suspect him."

There was a shy childish pride in her voice, an artless pride in the ingenuity of her own plan, which she could not conceal.

"I see!" said Martin. "And Pedro came back too soon?"

"No!" she said, "as a matter of fact he was a little late. Alonzo was early. I heard him gently tapping the window down below; the signal he always gives."

"You heard him?" Martin stared at her. "Then why? . . ."

SHE looked him full in the face for one moment with her beautiful dark eyes wide open, candid and innocent as clear pools. Then to his amazement he saw a deep flush suffuse the pallor of her cheeks and she dropped her lids till the long lashes lay blackly against that unwonted burning.

"I could not bear that you should be killed," she said in a low voice.

"Good God!" said Martin. "We have only known each other an hour."

"An hour," she answered, "that is an expression without meaning. Time is measured by intensity; you and I both know that," and she laid her hands against his breast.

Martin groaned as he felt his own hands folding over hers. She was everything that no woman should be. She was entirely regardless of any law save that of her own desires. She was cruel, as a panther in a jungle is cruel, or as a child that pulls the wings off flies, and yet something within himself said:

"But this is what women are really like. I have always known it at the

back of my mind. They just go straight for what they want and don't care about anything else."

And for another strange flash this very different woman seemed to be one with his kindly Mira.

He had a swift remembrance of a day when Mira had been angry with someone who had tried to "do him down." He had been amazed then at the steely look which had come over her sweet face.

"I could kill him," she had said, and he had realized that she meant it. "Nothing counts if you love a person," she had explained to him.

A slow, dragging step sounded on the stair and once again the image of Mira sank away even as Ilonka's hand fell from his clasp.

"It is Pedro coming back," she said. "He is frightened; I can tell by his step."

The sounds drew nearer and, darting to the door behind the portière, she pulled it open.

"Go in there," she said urgently. "For my sake."

Martin shook his head. He was not feeling particularly courageous and there was no bravado in his action as he sat down on one of the hideous red plush chairs to wait for Pedro. But he did feel that it was impossible for him to skulk in hiding when another man's life had already been sacrificed for his.

CHAPTER VI.

WAXWORKS

PEDRO came into the room with dragging steps, so depressed—Martin could think of no other word for it—that at first he didn't even notice the enormity of a strange man's presence. Ilonka faced him arrogantly.

"Well," she demanded, "have you found out your blunder?"

"A ghastly blunder!" groaned Pedro. "It is Alonzo, my poor old Alonzo. I only parted from him down the river an hour ago. He was going back to headquarters then. He must have found something urgent to tell me and came to wait for me in the garden, not wishing to disturb you."

He sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"What did I tell you?" asked Ilonka. "I was sure you had made a mess of things as usual. Now they will hang you and that will serve you right for having been so stupid."

A tremor of fright convulsed Pedro and he moaned aloud.

"You don't deserve that I should help you," continued Ilonka. "You have offered what is an unpardonable insult to me, but, after all, you are my husband and I don't want you to be hanged. You would look so silly hanging, my poor Pedro."

She had gone over to her husband's chair and was standing between him and Martin, so that Pedro, when he looked pleadingly up, didn't look beyond her.

"You mean you have a plan?" he asked.

"I may have a plan, but first you must promise me one thing. You will promise me that whatever I say, you will believe, or if you don't believe it, you will act as though you do. Do you swear that by the saints?"

"By every saint in the calendar," promised Pedro, "I will do everything that you say, if you will only help me to disembarrass myself of this."

"Very well, then." Ilonka stepped swiftly aside. "This is a friend who will help us," and she introduced Martin with a little wave of her hand.

For the moment Pedro remained stricken motionless and dumb, though his eyes bulged from his head, and his face, which had previously turned to a sickly pallor, became in-

jected with crimson. Ilonka passed swiftly behind him and, putting her arms round his neck, clasped her hands firmly together beneath his chin.

"Remember your promise," she said. "I will help you dispose of one corpse, but I will not help you with two; if you harm this young man, I shall denounce you at once to the police."

"What is to prevent me killing both of you?" shouted Pedro.

"Two things," said Ilonka. "The first is that you care much too much for me to kill me, and the second is that I took your revolver from your pocket last time you were in this room."

PEDRO clapped his hand to his pocket and found that she had spoken the truth.

"This gentleman," said Ilonka, "who doubtless you think is the famous lover that you have imagined to yourself, never met me before tonight. I went out to try and get help, because I was afraid, my poor Pedro, that you would commit some stupidity, even as you have done. I met this gentleman, and he came with me."

"Everything your wife says is quite true," said Martin.

He had remained sitting easily in his chair and he could see that his calm manner had its influence upon the excited foreigner in the check suit.

"I did come here to help your wife. . . ."

"But now you will help both of us, is it not so?" interrupted Ilonka, beseeching him with her eyes. "Listen, both of you; I have a plan."

They looked expectantly at her. She was so vital, so flame-like in her pale gown over which the light flickered with every little movement, that she dominated both the men.

"We will take Alonzo aboard the boat," she announced.

"Aboard the boat?" asked Pedro, his jaw falling. "But how do you propose to get him there?"

Ilonka ignored him and turned to Martin.

"I mentioned my husband's business just now," she said. "Well, I will tell you what it is, or at least what part of it is. He is a dealer in waxworks."

"In what?" asked Martin stupidly.

"A dealer in wax figures; he makes figures like your Madame Tussaud's. He supplies all the best waxworks shown here and in America. The headquarters of the waxworks industry is in Holland and so we have our own boat, a Dutch barge, in which we bring the figures over and we take the old worn-out figures back to melt them down and make them up again.

"We have a lot of figures in the house now. We will load them all into our van and we will put Alonzo in with them. If the police stop and examine us they will see the wax figures and never imagine that one of them is a dead body.

"Pedro will set sail with the morning tide and when he is half-way across he can get rid of Alonzo overboard."

MARTIN did some rapid thinking. He had never heard of Holland as a centre of the waxworks industry, but then, he admitted to himself, he knew nothing about waxworks. He did not, of course, believe for a moment that this somewhat fantastic traffic was the only one in which the exotic Pedro was engaged.

That, however, was not his affair, unless he were caught by the police, when it might become only too much his. But what, he asked himself, could he do, save help Ilonka in the only way that seemed practicable?

He was aware of a rising tide of recklessness within himself; of a delight in the pure adventure of the night's happenings, which, mingled with the heady draught of Ilonka's presence, was too potent for resistance. He picked up his overcoat from the chair and put it on, buttoning it up to the chin to hide the front of his dress shirt.

"We had better get to business, hadn't we?" he said; "there is no point in leaving Alonzo. . . . I am afraid I don't remember his other name . . . lying around any longer than need be."

"What a man," said Ilonka's admiring eyes, as she gazed at him. Aloud, she cried:

"Come, Pedro, you see our friend will help us. All you have to do is to try and keep quiet and leave everything to us. You bring down the figures while I get my coat."

As she passed into the room behind the portière, she smiled at Martin, a smile of utter confidence and childlike gratitude.

Pedro rose from his chair with a grunt.

"It is dangerous," he muttered, "very dangerous, however . . ." and he shrugged his great shoulders.

As he was leaving the room he looked suspiciously at Martin.

"Come with me, my friend," he said shortly, "and help me bring the figures down from the attic."

THERE followed five minutes which seemed to Martin, unaware of what the next hour or so had in store for him, the oddest of his life. He had had from his childhood a sort of psychic horror of waxworks.

As a little boy, his nursemaid had told him the fable that was at that period current about Madame Tussaud's, to the effect that anyone was offered twenty-five dollars who would stay for one night alone in the Chamber of Horrors, and how one man had accepted the challenge and had been found in the morning raving mad.

Five minutes in the Chamber of Horrors, surrounded by people, had been enough to convince Martin that he would not be in it alone for any money that could be offered him.

Now he passed up and down stairs with strange boneless figures lolling over his shoulder, their curiously dead feet, dead with that complete deadness which has never known life, held in his arms, while he could feel their bland waxen faces sticking out behind past his ears.

Pedro went into a shed that abutted onto the river at the end of the garden and after some preliminary explosions reappeared driving a small canvas-covered van, its lights gleaming palely through the fog like two huge unwinking eyes.

He drew up at the little gate in the garden-wall. Martin noticed that the taxi had disappeared, and for a moment he and Martin stood consulting together in low voices. Both had so far avoided any allusion to what they knew lay beneath the window, on one side of the door.

Martin gazed from his stack of dummies to the van and back at Pedro, who heaved a deep sigh, and Martin saw that his eyes were wet with tears.

"Pardon!" said Pedro, brushing the back of his hand across his face, "but I was so fond of that good Alonzo; he was such a friend to me."

The big brutal-looking man spoke as simply as a child. He produced a large scarlet handkerchief and blew his nose loudly.

"We must be practical," he declared, with a change of voice. "Let us put in four of these figures, so!"

And he and Martin laid four of the dummies side by side on the floor of the van.

"Now we will fetch the poor Alonzo and put him on top, and then we will put the other figures on top of him."

The moment which they could not avoid had arrived, and Martin and Pedro walked again up the garden path, Pedro turning to the left when they reached the front door.

Darkness and the fog prevented Martin seeing what they had come to find until they were right upon it, when his feet had already struck that peculiarly soft, yielding substance of a freshly-killed body.

He bent down and, fumbling as best as he could in the dark, he got hold of the ankles of the dead man. Pedro took the shoulders and between them they carried Alonzo down the garden path and hoisted him into the van.

By the time they had stacked the other figures over the body and Alonzo's feet were looking as innocent as all the others, or rather as sinister, (for a more shocking effect than all those dead-looking feet gave at the tail-end of the van Martin had never seen even in the War), Ilonka had arrived, wrapped in a dark coat with a little black hat pulled low over her eyes and with black slippers instead of those of silver which she had worn previously.

Pedro took his place behind the wheel and for a moment Ilonka stood looking from him to Martin. Then Pedro tapped the seat beside him.

"You come here," he said in a low voice to Ilonka.

With surprising docility she obeyed, giving a swift, tremulous smile to Martin.

"You sit on the back," she said, "and let your legs hang down. Have you a pipe? Yes? Well, smoke that. A pipe looks so innocent. Now we are ready." And the van started off.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH DARK AND FOG

MARTIN thought that he would never forget that drive through the darkness and fog, down streets that he was never to know; and yet, very soon, it was all to be to him in the bewilderment of his mind and senses as unsubstantial as a nightmare on awaking.

He sat there, swinging his legs as he had seen thousands of boys and men sit on the back of vans in London, enclosed by the night and the fog, forgetful, in the stress of this new and varied life which had come to fill his mind, of all his duties; regardless of his past life and heedless of his future.

He was only aware that Ilonka, a strange woman—or was she not rather a natural woman only strange by reason of her rarity?—was sitting under the same frail roof with him, almost within touch of his hand; while between them, under its unnatural canopy of simulated human being, lay the all-too-real body of a human being who had lived and breathed so short a while ago that when Martin had touched him, he was still warm.

Like most Englishmen, Martin had always been inclined to laugh at stories of "fatal women," of overpowering passion, and of the rest of what he would have vaguely referred to as the whole "bag of tricks."

Also like most Englishmen, he had always had deeply within him a sneaking longing that these things might be true; that a wild love and abandonment of the senses, and a life where adventure undertaken for such a love and such an abandonment was at once thronged with adventure, and yet held lightly, could be possible.

This rise through the dark and the

fog with love and cruelty and death and jealously traveling with him, was to him the sudden realization of the longings he had never even admitted to himself.

And even all the ridiculous parts of the affair—Pedro's outward appearance, his check suit, his mustaches, his stupid, angry face, the absurd wax figures, the commonplace furnishings of the house, Ilonka's too strong, cheap scent (though he had almost forgotten that)—even these things added to the enchantment.

He had ceased to criticize and was merely living.

They drove slowly because of the density of the night. A few other lights loomed occasionally through the fog, but Pedro, who must have known the way blindfold, drove through unfrequented streets. Every now and then Martin could see the dark loom of a warehouse, and twice he heard the sound of a ship's siren apparently quite close at hand.

The affair seemed absurdly easy. It was as though Nature herself were in a conspiracy to protect them, and Martin was congratulating himself that all would be well, when there came the flash of a bull's-eye lantern against the side of the van and a voice ordered them to halt.

For the first time in his life Martin experienced the sensation so familiar to breakers of the law, the sensation of fear at sight of a policeman.

Pedro brought the car to a standstill and the policeman came up to the back of the van and held his light so that it fell upon Martin's face.

"What have you got in here?" he said.

"Waxworks, Officer," said Martin cheerfully. "Would you like to have a look at them?"

He tugged at the pair of feet nearest to him and brought a peculiarly unpleasant-looking gentleman, with mutton-chop whiskers and a grim jaw, into a sitting position beside him on the tail-board, with the legs dangling down.

"Why are you carting waxworks about on a night like this?"

"My name is John Andrews, Officer," said Martin. "I am a social worker and I am getting up an entertainment for my poor people in the East End. Part of the show is going to consist of waxworks, and here they are."

MARTIN'S easy manner and his cultured voice impressed the policeman favorably. Nevertheless, he held his lantern in the interior of the van and began to satisfy himself that it was indeed loaded with nothing but wax figures.

Martin's heart thumped loudly, but he took a pull at his pipe and remained outwardly calm.

"Where is this place of yours," asked the policeman, "where you are going to hold your entertainment?"

Martin was in a quandary.

He imagined that, roughly speaking, they must be somewhere down Limehouse way; but it would never do to mention a place in a direction different from that in which they were going and he heartily wished that Ilonka had given him more information. There was nothing to do but to take a chance and he answered boldly:

"The Isle of Dogs, the Christian Lads' Welfare Institute. I expect you know it quite well."

The policeman was not going to confess ignorance and he nodded portentously.

"That's all right, sir," he said. "Nasty night to be out, but your passengers wont come to any harm," and he gave a facetious push to a pair of legs amidst the heap.

Next moment the expression of his

face changed. "That's no waxwork," he shouted. "That's a . . ." but never finished what he was going to say.

Pedro slipped in the clutch and started the van off at a breakneck speed. The policeman hung on to the tail-board but Martin Helford, barrister-at-law, gave the policeman a mighty punch under the jaw which lifted him into the air and dropped him in the middle of the road.

"That ought to keep him quiet for a bit," thought Martin, hanging on to the side of the van as it bumped and lurched around the corner.

The sound of a policeman's whistle, however, showed that the constable was a tough subject and another whistle answered it.

"Martin," called Ilonka's voice softly, "you were splendid."

"It wont do much good, I'm afraid," said Martin. "We're bound to smash up; come in here, you'll be safer," and leaning across the pile of false bodies and the one real one, he pulled Ilonka backward into the van.

For a moment they clung together, jostled by those unnatural contacts of waxen hands and hard, uncanny knees, and the next moment the crash came; the car knocked violently up against a wall, tottered and came to a standstill.

Pedro's voice called out: "All is well; we have arrived. I am not hurt."

"Nor is your wife," said Martin curtly, holding Ilonka strongly against him.

He could have sworn that the little noise she made was a smothered laugh.

PEDRO had extricated himself from his driving seat with difficulty, for the front of the car was badly damaged. He whistled three times—two long whistles and a short one, and then after a moment he gave a peculiar low call. From the muffled whiteness before them an answering call came back.

"Good! They have heard us," said Pedro. "Come, let us be getting everything out."

Ilonka stood on one side while the two men lifted out all the contents of the van and just as they had finished Martin heard the chug! chug! of a motor boat coming nearer and nearer. The fog was thinning now, as a little cold wind blew down the river; and he saw that they were standing at the head of a flight of dark and greasy steps. As he thought of how easily the car might have plunged down into the rapidly flowing river, he felt slightly sick.

There was no time, however, for anything but action; and in the next few minutes he and Pedro and one of the men who had come in the motorboat were busy carrying the wax figures and the body of Alonzo down the steps and stowing them behind the canvas dodger of the boat.

The propeller kicked round and they were speeding away across the river, leaving the shattered van behind them to tell the tale of their flight only too plainly, should the police succeed in finding it.

The tide was at half-ebb and running strongly as the motorboat dropped down and made fast alongside a big Dutch barge yacht of varnished wood with great lee-boards folded against her hull.

Another man appeared, bending over the bulwarks, and to him they passed up, one by one, the limp figures, only the difference of weight and that curious difference in the "feel" telling them which was the body of Alonzo. They worked swiftly and without unnecessary speech, after the manner of sailors.

Pedro spoke rapidly in Portuguese with the man who appeared to be the skipper; and Ilonka, slipping her

hand into Martin's, drew him to the head of the companion, whispering:

"Come down here with me; I must speak to you alone. Quick! Before Pedro follows."

Martin bent his head to avoid knocking it against the low hatch which was drawn almost completely over the companion and they crept cautiously down into what he knew must be the saloon of the vessel. It was in complete darkness, but Ilonka fumbled for a switch and the next moment the place was flooded with light.

Martin looked about him. The saloon was commodious. It had an oblong swing table down the center and upholstered seats down either side that could be used as beds. There were the usual furnishings of a yacht's saloon, a barometer, racks for tumblers and bottles, bookshelves with wooden battens across them to keep the books in place when at sea.

Ilonka pulled off her little black hat with a weary gesture, and passed her hands over her hair to smooth it. She looked extremely young and wistful as she did this, like a tired child.

"Ilonka," said Martin, "what is to happen to you?"

"I don't know," she said

She came and stood against him and leaned her head against his shoulder confidingly, with no physical abandonment but with a complete yielding up of her will that struck at his heart.

"You will arrange everything, Martin, I know," she said. "You will tell me what to do. Hush!" as he began to speak... "here comes Pedro." And indeed the backs of Pedro's legs were seen descending the companion slowly and with care.

Two little patent-leather feet stuck out beyond either arm and Martin realized with a shock of distaste that he and one of the other men were bringing the body of Alonzo down into the saloon.

They came shuffling in with it and laid it on the swing table, where it looked pathetically helpless. Even death was unable to bestow much majesty upon the man who had been Ilonka's lover.

MARTIN'S feeling on looking for the first time upon Alonzo's face was one of grotesque disappointment. Quite suddenly Ilonka herself seemed less wonderful to him in that she could have had this tailor's dummy as a lover. Swiftly she read his thought.

Pedro had opened a locker and was burrowing amongst clinking bottles and Ilonka, coming between Martin and the table with its unhappy burden, placed both of her cool, firm little palms over Martin's eyes.

"Martin! Martin!" she whispered. "I know he is silly, even now that he is dead; and of course, he was much sillier when he was alive —everybody is! But it was all I could have, Martin. I never met anyone else and he was kind though he was silly. You can't think how kind he was! And I so wanted a little kindness."

He forgot the first half of her speech in the sweetness of its climax and was left only with the impression of her human tenderness toward the foolish little dead man.

She slipped off her coat and laid it over Alonzo; and though at the back of Martin's mind he was aware that she only did so because she was afraid that he might again get that revulsion of distaste, yet somehow, she invested the action, even to him, with a sweet womanliness that brought a lump to his throat.

Pedro had by now found the bottle he sought and was pouring out stiff doses of brandy into two small, thick tumblers. One he pushed toward Martin sulkily and the other he

gulped down himself with loud sucking noises of appreciation.

"Ah, that is better," he said, though his hand was still shaking so that the glass rattled against the top of the locker as he put it down.

CHAPTER VIII.

STRANGE CONTACT

THERE came a sudden scurry of sea-boots down the companion and one of the men burst into the little saloon.

"There's a police boat coming down the river," he cried.

Pedro was galvanized into active life. For the first time Martin saw a glimpse of the quality that had made him the leader in whatever nefarious enterprise it was in which he and his confederates were engaged. "Slip the cable," he roared, "never mind the anchor," and he plunged forward under the companion. The next moment Martin heard the roar of the motor starting and the yacht began to gather way downstream.

Martin made one jump to the companion and, standing with his head out of the hatch stared up the dark river where the fog was eddying in swirls, here thick, there thin.

"Close that hatch or put out those lights," roared the skipper.

A click from below which plunged the saloon and companion in darkness showed that Ilonka had heard the command. The yacht was racing down-stream, aided by the tide.

Martin felt that they would be extremely lucky if they hit nothing. He descended into the saloon and called softly to Ilonka, and in the next moment she was beside him. Again she gave that little laugh so expressive of a sort of reckless courage, to which he was now accustomed, but which made his heart leap with an unwilling admiration.

He had hardly touched her hands as she held them toward him in the darkness before he was struck somewhat violently in the back by something which had been thrown down the companion. It was followed by another and yet another something.

An irate sailorman had found all the wax figures in his way and was hurling them below to a suitable accompaniment of running commentary.

Martin began to gather the unpleasant creatures to his breast and started as best he could in the darkness to throw them upon the saloon seats.

Ilonka came to the saloon with him and, shutting the door, turned on the light, and Martin looked around at the scattered bodies piled in strange unnatural attitudes.

One of them had fallen across the covered form of Alonzo and in doing so its head had been broken open and a little stream of white powder was dribbling from the cavity in the waxen skull.

Knowledge leaped into Martin's eyes as he picked up the figure and threw it upon the seat, and he turned and looked at Ilonka.

She nodded her head.

"Yes, snow. Snow in some and saccharine in others. We smuggle both."

They were standing, still staring at each other, when the night was suddenly torn in two by the shattering noise of machine-gun fire. Ilonka became, if possible, a little paler.

"That means we are finished," she said. "Pedro has opened fire. Oh, the fool! The fool!"

The sound of answering shots came quite close to them and a bullet tore through the coach-house roof with a shattering of glass. Martin sprang for the switch and turned out the electric light. In the darkness he felt for Ilonka, but by some mis-

calculation his hands came instead upon the body of Alonzo from which the coat had slipped. He knew it must be Alonzo.

There was no other form upon the table and this one was lying straight out as Alonzo's had been lying one second earlier when the light was extinguished, and yet . . . it was a wax figure that he held under his horrified hands and not the form of a dead man.

The horror of that strange impact paralyzed him for a moment; then he passed his hands agitatedly up and down the figure. He felt Alonzo's face with its upbrushed mustache; he felt the pointed patent boots—and yet it was a wax figure, unmistakably a wax figure that was shocking the very nerves of his finger-tips.

Frantically he turned and plunged his hands into the mass of dummies that he had thrown upon the seat of the saloon and lo! the warm and flaccid flesh of newly-dead men met him under the clothes of every form he touched.

The saloon was full of dead men; only that one figure which he had known to be a corpse lying so neatly upon the table was a dummy.

He felt frantically for the light and switched it on, but he saw nothing save Ilonka, who was hanging round his neck, eyes wide with terror at last. Another shot came and she fell limply in his arms.

"It is the end," she whispered; "we're all finished except you. Love me for one moment, Martin!"

But as he kissed her mouth the tide of her life-blood welled against his lips. As he frantically called her name he felt her suddenly sag, a dead weight, across his arm.

A crow of triumph made him look up to see Pedro standing at the foot of the companion, his revolver in his hand, and he knew that the bullet had been intended for the mark that it had sought. Wheeling round, Pedro fired all the remaining shots in his gun into the motor. It gave a last despairing chug! chug! and ceased to function.

In a sudden strange silence the yacht floated upon the tide.

"You have killed her," cried Martin. "By God, you have killed her!"

Bearing Ilonka to the table, he pushed away the body lying upon it, whether a real man or a waxwork he no longer cared or noticed, and laid Ilonka down in its stead.

There came the sound of shouting and more shots and then the clatter of men's feet clambering aboard. The police came pouring down the companion, two of them seizing Pedro as he stood with his empty revolver dangling from his hand.

Martin was conscious of nothing save that the whole of womanhood lay faintly smiling on the table and that these men were going to seize her with violent hands.

He flung himself at the foremost officer, hitting out wildly as they all closed in upon him.

Suddenly he was borne backward against the still figure of Ilonka. As he fell, before the final blow caught him on the head and made everything cease to be for him, he had a moment of supreme horror as his hand came against her cheek and he felt it hard and unyielding as the cheek of a dummy.

CHAPTER IX.

THE QUESTING SPIRIT

WHEN Martin came to himself his head was aching and yet felt amazingly clear and light, as though he were floating in something more rarified than water, yet more sustaining than mere ether.

For the first moment he could see

nothing, although he had an impression of light and space around him.

Then there swam into his field of consciousness the naked branches of some elm trees and he realized that he was lying on the flagstones in the Temple and became aware that someone was holding up his head.

He raised his eyes to meet the bright gaze of Palliser, with something of solicitude and anxiety in its intent glance.

"Are you all right, old man?" asked Palliser.

"Where is Ilonka?" asked Martin.

"You help me, constable," said Palliser's voice, "we are quite close to his rooms."

And then Martin saw that one of his enemies, one of the police, was standing on the other side of him. He tried to protest, but the constable, cheery and friendly, only said:

"That's all right, sir," and helped him to his feet.

But Martin saw the glance of amused intelligence that passed from the policeman to Palliser.

"Making a night out of it!" whispered the constable and Palliser nodded in agreement.

The vulgarity stung Martin to reply, but he found the words that he wanted to say refused to come to his tongue and that his voice trailed away into silence.

That's all right, sir," said the constable again with a "hail-fellow-well-met, men-will-be-men, I-have-been-there-myself" sort of voice.

Martin made no further protest; and only when the constable had gone, after the sound of clinking coins had passed to him from Palliser, did Martin speak again and then only after he had looked around the green-paneled walls faintly illumined by the pale rays of a wintry sun.

"You don't understand, Palliser," said Martin, though Palliser had said nothing, "I have to get back."

"You *are* back, old man," said Palliser. "This is where you belong."

Martin sat huddled in the armchair where they had placed him, his haggard glance wandering around the room. It came to rest on a photograph of Mira, smiling her sweet, generous smile that he knew so well, and that yet for one moment looked alien to him.

"Where did you find me, Palliser?" he asked at last.

"I didn't find you," said Palliser. "You were found by that constable, who looked through your pockets and got your address; you were lying on a wharf down Limehouse way and he brought you home to me here. I was waiting for you."

THE worst of Martin's horrors passed from his mind. He had been terrified that it had all been a dream; and if Ilonka were a dream, then what was reality but the shadow of a shadow?

Palliser, who had been speaking to the manservant through the door in a low voice, now came up to him bearing a steaming cup of coffee, which Martin began to drink obediently.

"Listen, Martin!" said Palliser. "You have been dreaming, do you understand me? You have been dreaming; you must never forget that."

"I have not been dreaming," said Martin, "I have been living more really than I have ever lived in my life before."

"That's quite likely. *You slipped through the chink, Martin.* Don't you remember how last night I was trying to explain to you that all the lives of each man, instead of happening one after the other, really all exist in space at the same time, like the carved Chinese ivory balls

that are one inside of the other?

"When we dream our ordinary dreams at night we slip through into one of our other lives, generally a smaller, poorer life enclosed in this one. You slipped through into a larger life outside this one that you are living in now, but it was a dream none the less."

"It was real," repeated Martin obstinately.

"Of course, it was real," cried Palliser, losing his temper. "That's just what I was explaining to you; and you will live it some time, but it's not what you're living now.

"You may be going to die this year, my friend, or you may be going to die in forty years' time, and then, perhaps, you will live the life that you got into by mistake this night."

"Let's be reasonable," argued Martin, feeling stronger for the coffee. "I will tell you the events of the past night and you will see for yourself that all its detail is essentially of the present time. It can't belong anywhere but here, and now."

And slowly and painfully, shaken with the memory of emotions, he recounted his adventures. Palliser lit a pipe and listened in silence.

"My dear Martin," he said when the end had been reached, "I have nothing to say except to point out a few things to you. You have laid stress on several points.

"You mention that the red plush furniture in this strange riverside house was familiar to you . . . . It was, in fact, the furniture which you had in your first rooms in London.

"You and this Ilonka had precisely similar experiences in childhood, even to little matters such as hedges with leaves twinkling in the sun.

"You recognized in her, you say, all sorts of qualities that you had never noticed in the women you had met and yet which at once struck you as being the qualities you felt were true to all women. You even had moments when it seemed to you to be actually Mira whom you were holding in your arms.

"And this Ilonka herself, was she not, as well as being an embodiment of all that your instinct told you, and truly told you, constituted woman—was she not also the embodiment of a boy's notions of an enchantress? The silver dress, the strong scent, the black hair and eyes—all that was, believe me, the remnants of your long-forgotten earliest unsophisticated notions of strange and fascinating women.

"Don't you see, my dear Martin, that last night you slipped through into another life, but carried with you all the lumber lying at the back of your mind? . . . Smugglers in cocaine! . . . You say she even called it 'snow'! . . . I ask you, my dear fellow, where did you get that from? . . . From the hundreds of reports you have read in the cheap Sunday papers."

"I tell you," repeated Martin, "that she was real."

But even as he said it, he remembered that last strange contact.

"Tell me," asked Palliser, "when did you last have anything to do with waxworks?"

MARTIN wrinkled his brows in an effort to remember accurately.

"A few months ago," he said, "I was passing Madame Tussaud's on the night of the great fire and I picked up some of the figures as they were handed out. They felt exactly like the figures I handled last night."

"You see!" said Palliser.

"But, my dear man!" argued Martin, "don't you see that it was all *real?* The house, the van, the yacht, everything? It had all the ridiculousness of real things. Why!

Think of the taxi! I tell you it was a taxi, a solid ordinary taxi."

"Ah!" answered Palliser, "the taxi? You said, did you not, that you took its number down? Just look in your pockets and see if you still have that number."

Martin felt in the inner pocket of his coat and produced the slip of paper on which he had written the number of the taxi. He read it aloud, "G 2930"; and then he gazed at the little slip of paper with his mouth hanging open.

"Does that say anything to you?" asked Palliser.

Martin replied heavily: "Mira's telephone number is Gerrard 2930."

"You see!" said Palliser again. "You slipped through into another ivory ball, my dear Martin, because there happened to you what happens to a man very seldom—an especially large chink in the carving of the ivory ball in which you are now living happened to come against an equally large chink in another and probably a larger ivory ball—the one just outside the one you are living in.

"You slipped through, but you carried with you a mass of stuff lying at the bottom of your own soul.

"Believe me, Martin, you are very lucky to have come back again. Many men who have adventured as far as you have, have never found their way back. The ivory spheres have kept on turning and they have never found the moment when two chinks came opposite each other so that the way back was clear.

"I should never have forgiven myself, Martin, if that had happened to you, and if it had only been what men call a 'dead body' that had been brought back this morning."

"You!" asked Martin, "what had you to do with it?"

"Do you remember" asked Palliser, "how last night we talked about real and unreal? Don't you see that what happened to you when the bodies of human beings felt to you like waxworks and the waxworks felt like human beings, was just a translation of our thought into the terms of your dream?

"Martin, I shall be sorry I ever tampered with your mind last night if you refuse to realize all this."

"How do you account," demanded Martin, "for the fact that I was found on a wharf down Limehouse way?"

"When a man is ridden by the questing spirit that was yours last night, he wanders far afield physically as well as mentally. I could not pretend to say where you went last night."

CHAPTER X.

THE IMAGE OF ILONKA

THE bells of the Temple Church began to ring for early service.

Martin got up and went to the window. He stood there till the bells had ceased to ring, and in the little silence that followed, the chimes of Big Ben struck eight o'clock.

"The wind is still westerly," said Martin. "By the way, was there a fog last night?"

"Yes," said Palliser.

"You see!" said Martin, mimicking him.

"I see nothing, but that you must forget all this," said Palliser sternly.

He wandered round the room as though in some distress of spirit and suddenly he paused before a book that lay open, but face downward, on the writing table.

"Were you reading this book before we came to dinner last night?" he asked.

Martin looked around wearily.

"If it's Balsac's 'Contes Drolatiques,' I was," he answered.

Then, my dear fellow, the whole riddle is solved, as even you must admit. You were, of course, reading 'The Seneshal's Wife,' the story, allowing for variations, of your adventures last night."

He lifted up the book and glanced at the open pages.

"Just as I said! 'The Seneshal's Wife!' Now are you convinced?"

"No," said Martin stubbornly. "What of Ilonka? I tell you I held her in my arms."

"As you will again today, my friend," said Palliser imperturbably, "for your Ilonka is—woman."

MARTIN buried his face in his hands, striving to call up behind his closed lids the image of Ilonka; and for a flash it seemed to him that he saw again that cool, lifted face, those sidelong eyes. But even as she smiled at him she became Mira, only a Mira with possibilities about her that he had never before realized.

Desperately he clung to the thought of Ilonka, for it seemed to him that he betrayed her more by still loving Mira than even he had betrayed Mira by his passion for Ilonka.

He raised his head and stared at Palliser with a pathetic eagerness.

"Tell me, Palliser," he said, "you who can explain everything—how much of my dream was a real life that is waiting for me somewhere, and how much was what you call the lumber that I carried into it with me in my subconscious soul?"

"That would make a not uninteresting analysis," answered Palliser thoughtfully, "but you will have to do it soon, before everything except a vague knowledge that you have loved and lost something of peculiar beauty has faded from your mind.

"The red plush furniture, the strong scent, the waxworks and all the rest of the outer phenomena were, of course, what you took with you in your subconscious memory. What then remains?"

"Yes, what?" asked Martin.

"Emotion keener than you ever felt," said Palliser, "a beauty that struck at your soul. But more important than either of these, a knowledge of truth, a facing of the facts of human nature that has never been yours before. Not bad to have learned all that through what people would call a dream."

Clues

By EDGAR WALLACE

I HAVE a smart Aleck of a detective-sergeant in my division who is strong for clues. The harder they are the better he likes 'em. He reckons finger-prints are too childishly easy for a full-grown officer of the C. I. D.

"I believe there is a lot in that tobacco-ash theory, Sooper," he said. "It's fiction, I know, but there's a lot of truth in stories."

So I put up to him the well-known case of the State against Uriah—or, better still, Uriah against David with Bathsheba intervening.

The chief was saying the other day that there has been nothing new in murder crime since the celebrated Cain and Abel affair.

"In fact, Sooper," he said, "you can dig down into the Old Book and find parallels for most every case that comes up at the Old Bailey."

This, in a way, is true. All the same, crime was a mighty simple affair in about B. C. 3000. If a feller didn't like another feller he just dropped him down a well or snicked off his head; and what happened to the snicker depended on the kind of a pull he had with the chief priest or the king or whoever was the man on top.

There wasn't any come-back with Uriah, for instance, and no complications. They just handed him up to the front line trenches and sent him out single-handed to see what the Amalekites were thinking up for tomorrow's battle.

But if Uriah had had a tough brother Bill or a sister named Lou, there would surely have been trouble for David, and more still, if Uriah, instead of getting himself carved up by the enemy, had sneaked back to headquarters by a roundabout way.

The David I'm thinking of was a mean man named Mr. Penderbury Jonnes, who owned three stores on Oxford Street and had a country mansion near Hertford, to say nothing of a flat in Hanover Square.

I happened to know Pen Jonnes. He was a Welshman on the soft goods side of the race. A tall, red-faced fellow with eyes like a puppy dog's and a mustache like a cavalry officer.

We used to think that he was a bachelor in the sense that he hadn't any regular matrimonial arrangement. But this wasn't so.

He had a wife, though nobody seemed to have met her. She had been a shopgirl in one of his stores; and he didn't find out until it was too late that her brother was Yorkshire Harry, the only cruiser weight that ever went ten rounds with that Yankee fellow who held the title till some girl told him he looked grand in a dress-suit.

YORKSHIRE Harry used to do a little blackmailing on the side, and he ran with the Stiney's, who were cracksmen on the top scale. Anyway, Penderbury took the shortest way out of trouble and was married at the Henrietta Street Registry Office.

I expect he was sorry, because Yorkshire Harry was caught the very next year and died in Gloucester Gaol from some fool thing.

I used to get a whole lot of anonymous letters about Penderbury written in a woman's hand. Every second word was spelled incorrectly.

Generally the letters had a Hertford postmark, and if half the things they accused Jonnes of doing were true, he'd have lived permanently in jail.

It was then I found out about Mrs. Jonnes and got a specimen of her handwriting. After that we didn't take too much notice of the anonymous letters, whether they were signed "A Frend" or "A lovver of Justice."

Interfering between man and wife is the very last instruction in the Police Code. I gathered that Mrs. Jonnes did not like her husband and let it go at that.

One letter I remember very well. I'll spell it according to my ideas of how it ought to be spelled.

> If he wasn't afraid that the police would come after him, why does he keep all that money in his safe ready in case he has to jump out of the country?

As a matter of fact, I did know that Penderbury kept a lot of money in his safe at Hertford, and so did somebody else. Two burglars tried to "bust" the house once and it came out at the trial.

Jonnes had a cashier named Banford—Horace Angel Banford. I never quite got the hang of that "Angel" and I never asked him, though I knew him pretty well.

He was one of those Adam's apple tenors who sang so well that nothing could improve him. People used to say what a pity it was that he didn't go to a master for a few lessons. He was that kind of vocalist. But he went fine at our Police Orphanage concerts, and that is where I came to meet him.

He was a tall, thin, sandy man with hollow cheeks, short sight and a schoolgirl complexion; and the last idea that he'd ever start was that he'd ever qualify for that 9 a. m. walk from cell to gallows.

Crime and music were his hobbies. I was surprised, when he invited me down to his little flat in Bloomsbury, to find the number of books he had about criminals.

But he was sensible with it; never thought he could spot a homicide by the color of his eyes and the curious way he wagged his ears. One thing he was certain about.

"Nine out of every ten murderers wouldn't be caught if they weren't boneheads," he said to me one night. "A crime is like any other job. You have to be efficient to hold it down."

We were all alone because his wife was out. She went out a lot; she was a great dancer.

"She goes with a lady friend," said Mr. Banford. "Personally, dancing bores me, but she loves it."

That made it all right. Anything Dora Banford loved—dress, dancing, pretty little jewels—was all right.

Banford's salary was ten pounds a week—that's about fifty dollars American, isn't it? And he did everything on that—Bloomsbury flat, a well-dressed wife, jewels and dances. And it can't be done.

I went again, because he had a book on the Leamington murder which he'd lent and was getting back; and naturally, as I was the man who pinched Pike Gurney, I wanted to see if the feller that wrote the book had given me all the credit I deserved.

I met Mrs. Banford in the hall; she was pulling on her gloves when I went in, and I can tell you she was a peach. One of those fluffy little things with wild golden hair that never stays put.

She sort of gave me a look under her long lashes and said (not out loud, but my receptivity is pretty

good, "who is the old bird with the big feet?" or something equally interesting.

HORACE ANGEL fussed around her like a nanny before a baby's first party. He sort of leaned over her and fanned her with his wings. Down to the street door he went with her, got her a cab and put her inside, and then he came back with his silly, thin face all red and smirky.

"The best wife in the world!" he said.

I was with him for two hours and picked out all the bits in the book about me. I must say that the fellow in the book was an honest man and only made one mistake. He said I took Pike as he was going into the Branscombe House Hotel, when in fact I took him as he was coming out.

At one o'clock the next morning I had a pressing engagement with the reserves. We raided the Highlow Club in Fitzroy Square. We had information that Fogini, the manager, was selling booze out of hours and that everybody who went to the Highlow didn't go to dance.

There was a baccarat game on the top floor, and there were all sorts of nice little private dining-rooms where people stayed who didn't play cards and weren't keen on dancing.

The raid went according to plan, and in Room 7 I found Mrs. Banford and Mr. Jonnes. They were sitting at a little table with a very large bottle of champagne, and as far as I could see when I opened the door, he was holding her two hands across the table.

She snatched them away when I barged in, and I saw a puzzled sort of look walking alongside her fear—she was trying to place me.

Jonnes went redder than usual.

"What the devil is the idea of this?" he snapped.

"You're under arrest," said I, "for consuming spirituous liquor after the hours by law prescribed," which is the classy way of saying that he was boozing out of hours.

That made his color run.

"Can't this be squared?" he said. "I'm Mr. Jonnes, of Jonnes Mantle Corporation."

He yanked out his pocket-book.

"Don't insult me with five," I said, when he slipped a note. "My price is ten millions. Who is the lady?"

Of course I knew, but I didn't let on. He seemed to have forgotten all about her.

"Oh," he said, like a man who had to bring his mind down to trifles, "she's Mrs. Smith, an Australian lady."

I ordered him down to the dance-room, where my boys were doing a little asking, and he went. This Mrs. Banford's face was the color of chalk and she was going after him when I called her back.

"I'm playing favorites for the first time in years," I said. "There's a pretty good fire-escape at the back. I'll show you the way."

I did more than that; I took her down and tipped off the man on duty to let her pass out—said she was a Highness and we didn't want any Highnesses in this kind of scandal.

Jonnes came up next morning before the Marylebone magistrate and got his fine; and so far as I was concerned there was the end of the lady who went dancing with a girl friend.

Only things don't work out that way in life, which is a story that's continued an' continued.

ABOUT six months after this I stepped into the charge room at Limber Street Station, and what did I see? Horace Angel in the steel pen. He had the color of a man who wasn't expected to live.

Poor old Horace, caught with the goods. Two thousand pounds' worth

of embezzlement on his soul. And there, resting his arm on the sergeant's desk, was Jonnes.

Horace Angel had nothing to say; and if he had he was short of speech. The jailer put him below and I strolled up to Penderbury Jonnes.

"He has been swindling me for years. I hate doing this, because I know his wife, poor little woman. But I trusted him. Why, I've even sent him down to Hertford with the key of my safe, where there are thousands of pounds."

That was his end of it. When I interviewed Horace Angel in his dugout he gave me another slant to the story.

It wasn't easy to get it, I can tell you, because when he wasn't weeping he was cursing Dora Banford and Penderbury Jonnes. And when he wasn't cursing Dora he was forgiving her, though I didn't notice that he forgave Penderbury much.

"We're going to start afresh when I come out," he said. "I never gave the little girl a chance, Sooper. All I wanted to do was read an' sing, and that's pretty dull for a woman.

"I've been a scoundrel and dragged her name in the mud. How that hound caught me I don't know. Somebody on the inside must have seen the duplicate set of books."

"Where did you make them up?" I asked.

"At home," he gulped. "God! what a fool I was! And they came straight to my flat and found them, Sooper. The hired girl must have been in their pay."

I let him go on.

"What's all this about Jonnes and your wife?" I asked.

"Nothing!" he said, very loud, but by and by I got it out of him.

Horace Angel had a friend who took a part in a West End revue. This friend was a genuine tenor and had a couple of Come-my-love-the-moon-is-shining numbers.

The queer thing about a stage tenor is that his throat is always going wonky. Just before the curtain goes up he strolls into the manager's office and says: "Sorry, old boy, but you'll have to put on the understudy," and naturally that leads to his having a lot of fuss made over him both before and after.

But sometimes his throat does really go wrong, and Horace Angel, being a sort of floating understudy, was sometimes sent for to take his place.

ONE night a hurry-up call came to him. It was just after his wife had gone out to meet her girl friend; and Horace Angel went down to the theatre and made up.

He was rather glad she had gone because she knew nothing about his understudying—Horace Angel was a little sensitive on the point of his voice.

His entry was toward the end of the first act. He was half-way through that love-and-moon stuff when he happened to look into the stage-box. And there was Dora and Mr. Jonnes. They were right at the back of the box and he gathered that they weren't interested in the play.

He got through the numbers and went home. There was a row, I suppose; he didn't tell me anything about that. And a few weeks later Jonnes pinched him.

Now whether Jonnes knew all the time that poor old Horace Angel was robbing him, and kept quiet because of the pull it gave him, or whether the auditors made the discovery, I've never found out.

At the Old Bailey the judge took a serious view of the crime and sent Banford down for three years.

Two days after he was sentenced, Mrs. Banford paid the rent in advance, locked up the flat, and went to

Paris. Mr. Jonnes followed the next day.

I had a talk with Uriah at Wormwood Scrubbs.

"There is only one way to hurt Jonnes," he said, "and when I come out I'm going to do it."

You don't take much notice of what newly convicted people say, and I passed it. I said nothing about Mrs. Bathsheba except to lie up a message from her to say that she was bearing her affliction patiently.

But he got to know when he was in Dartmoor. Every man has a friend who thinks that bad news is the only news worth knowing, and Horace Angel had several friends like that.

I never saw Jonnes and Dora together, not that I had many opportunities, but I never did. One of our inspectors who went over to bring back a bank clerk who had left London hurriedly with a block of the bank's assets, told me that she had a flat in the Avenue Bois de Boulogne (which is going some), but personally I knew nothing about her.

But just about then I met Mrs. Jonnes. The anonymous letters were piling up at the office and the chief was getting a little tired of reading 'em.

"Go down and see this Mrs. Jonnes, Sooper, and tell her from me that until we get short on regular crime, we haven't time to investigate the chicken-chasing propensities of the modern husband."

I went down to Hertford midweek, because Mr. Jonnes would be in town, and after a lot of difficulty I saw his wife.

She had been a good-looker, but years of Penderbury had sort of put an "A" in her face; if you've seen the nose lines and the drooping mouth of dissatisfied ladies you'll know what I mean.

She had a Cockney accent with a sort of whistle in it, and what she didn't say about Mr. Jonnes was that he was a perfect gentleman and a model husband.

"I live the life of a dog," she said. "One of these days I'll poison him, I will! If my poor darling brother was alive——"

I got in a word or two about anonymous letters and she gave me her views on the police and the way they allowed wives to be beaten and locked up in rooms without food and treated like dirt by the servants.

"One of these days——"

Those were her last words to me, and somehow I didn't feel that they were quite idle, for in Mrs. Jonnes' veins ran the blood of three tough generations on both sides of the family.

WHEN Horace was released I made it my business to call on him. He was sitting in the dining-room of the flat, going through a lot of letters that had come during his absence. I remember that one of them had a check for his performance the night he peeked into the stage box.

"I'm starting all over again, Sooper," he said, and he was very cheerful. "A friend of mine has offered me a job in Peckham; not a big salary but enough with which to carry on."

He did not mention his wife, but he did speak of Jonnes.

"There is a man who ought to be out of the world," he said, as calmly as though he was talking about rice pie. "The more one thinks about Jonnes the more useless a creature he seems. He has never done a stroke of work for the money he has. His father left him the stores and he uses his wealth to corrupt the pure and the foolish."

"Quite a lot of people ought to be out of the world, Horace Angel," I said, "and sooner or later they will be. Give Nature a chance and she'll

put everybody where they belong."

He smiled at this: a sour, crooked smile.

This was a Thursday afternoon. On Saturday afternoon, at four o'clock, Penderbury Jonnes went out of his big house at Hertford with a gun under his arm. He said that he was going to shoot rabbits.

"Field Towers," which was the name of his house, stands in about eighty acres of good rough shooting. The estate is surrounded by a wall except for about three hundred yards, where a bean-shaped covert of beech and pine trees separates his land from Lord Forlmby's estate.

At about 5.35 one of Lord Forlmby's gamekeepers, stalking a stoat, came through the covert and saw a man lying huddled up on the ground.

He ran across the rough and saw that it was Penderbury Jonnes and that he was dead. He had been shot at close range through the right shoulder, and his gun was lying by his side.

The gamekeeper sent for the police, and just about that time I had taken over the duties of chief detective inspector in the absence on leave of Joe Frawlett.

There are four chief inspectors attached to Scotland Yard, and these men have the four districts of London, so that when the Hertford police asked for assistance it was my job to go down.

I got to the Towers about nine o'clock that night. It was dark and raining, but on the advice of the local police the body hadn't been moved, and a ring of space had been kept clear around the hurdles which had been put up over the body.

"The man must have been killed by a discharge of the gun," the doctor told me. "Though the wound is a very slight one. Probably a stray pellet reached his heart. One barrel of the gun has been fired, and the servants at the Towers say that they heard only one explosion."

The gun had been carefully wrapped in oiled silk and taken to the house to be photographed for finger-prints. I had a talk with the Chief Constable of Hertford, who was on the spot.

"The shot was fired at about 4.15," he said; "the only person seen near the spot was a motorcyclist who was sheltering from the rain under a hedge on Lord Forlmby's side of the plantation. And the only discovery we have made is this glove."

He took it out of his pocket, a cheap cotton glove, right hand, slightly stained with mud and very damp.

"We found this at the end of the plantation," said the C. C. "It was too dark to look for footprints and there is no other clue."

I told off three of the Hertford police to make a search of the corpse by hand-lamp, and then went up to the house to see Mrs. Jonnes, and here I had my first shock.

She had left the Towers at some time in the afternoon.

"They'd been quarreling all morning," said the butler; "the worst shindy I've ever heard!"

"Where did you see her last?" I asked.

"Going into the gun-room," he said.

I made a search of the gun-room. Jonnes was a methodical sort of a man, who had little ivory labels on every stand showing the maker and date of purchase of every piece. And there were two blank spaces. One was the home of the gun that had been found by Jonnes' side, the other a new gun bought a week before.

I went up into Mrs. Jonnes' room. The wardrobe door was open, but there had been no attempt to pack anything. I made further inquiries. Jonnes' two-seated car was gone, had

been taken out of the garage some time between four and six.

I inspected the other rooms, and in one on the ground floor, which Jonnes used as a study, I saw the safe. The butler, who was beginning to get more at home with the police, and had lost the feeling that any word he uttered might hang him, became a little more chatty.

"The row was about a woman Banford. He was throwing her in Mrs. Jonnes' face, saying how wonderful she was. Mrs. Jonnes went almost mad; she was a very jealous woman."

ABOUT that time the policemen I had sent to search the wood came back. They had made two finds—a rain-sodden sheet of newspaper, in which something had been wrapped, and a small wooden box that somebody had hidden under a holly bush.

The newspaper was a week-old copy of the *Echo de Paris*. The box was locked, but there wasn't much trouble in opening it.

As a burglar kit it wasn't of much account—a couple of chisels, a jimmy, an electric torch, a key wrapped in tissue paper, a glazier's diamond and a folded square of fly-paper to hold a window pane when it was cut.

"That explains the glove," I said. "He carried them in his pocket to avoid finger-printing. But who goes traveling around with the *Echo de Paris?*"

The key interested me. I tried it on the safe and it opened the door.

There was one man to see, and that was Horace Angel. By twelve o'clock I was ringing the bell of his flat. I was a little surprised when he opened the door to me.

He was dressed in an old suit and a pair of slippers; but before the fire was a pair of wet boots, and over the back of a chair was hung a pair of trousers that were wet to the knees.

"Been out?" I asked.

He had been to Wembley Exhibition, he said.

Now Wembley ran a guessing competition. When you entered you received a card on which you wrote down your guess of the number of people who would pay for admission the next day. It was a green card, and was almost the first thing I saw lying on the table.

"There's a chance for a hundred pounds, Sooper," he said, and smiled as he took up the ticket and handed it to me.

"What time were you there?" I asked.

"About four," he said.

"You're a bit of a motorcyclist, aren't you?"

He shook his head.

"I've never ridden one," he answered. "Why do you ask?"

BEFORE I could say a word there was a knock on the hall door, and i m m e d i a t e l y afterward another knock. I was nearest. I went into the hall and opened the door.

A woman was standing there, so drenched, so miserably dressed, that I did not recognize her. There was a light on the landing, and she must have recognized me, for she cowered back as if I were going to strike her.

"Come in, Mrs. Banford," I said, and slowly she shrank past me into the dining-room where Horace Angel was standing by the table.

He said nothing; his wide-opened eyes were staring at her as though she were a ghost.

"Hello, Dora!" he whispered. "My God—how awful!"

She looked as if she had found her dress on a junk heap. It was old and ill-fitting.

"Hello, Horry!"

The words seemed to strangle her.

"Where have you come from, Mrs. Banford?" I asked.

She wore old boots that were soggy with rain and gray with mud; her skirt looked as if it had been soaked in water.

"From Dover... I walked," she said breathlessly. "I've been waiting outside to see you, Horry—I knew you were in London. I went to the Bloomsbury Garage and saw your old motor-bicycle. They said that you had been in two hours."

I looked at Horace Angel, who couldn't ride a motorcycle, but he had no eyes for me. He was tugging his handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his streaming face.

The handkerchief came out and something else—a white cotton glove that fell on the table. It was the left glove, an exact fellow to the other that had been found in the covert.

I said nothing, waiting. Dora went on:

"I've been in England four days. Jonnes had me put in prison—a French prison."

"Why?"

She shook her head.

"I was mad; I don't know; the knife was on the table and I was mad."

"You attacked him and you were put into a French prison: when?"

She put her hand before her eyes as if she were trying to think.

"A year ago. There was no trial, and when he did not appear to sign some papers they released me. They do that sort of thing in France. They paid my fare, third-class, to Dover, and I walked."

"I'm sorry."

HORACE Angel was so hoarse that he barked the words. And then she looked at him, I think for the first time.

"Are you? I'm past that, Horry. If that man hadn't come into the wood——"

"What's that?" I asked sharply. "Which wood?"

She turned her head.

"There's somebody at the door... police... but you're a policeman, aren't you?"

Her numbed fingers snapped back the catch of the shabby bag she carried.

"I don't want this——"

She laid a tiny automatic on the table.

And then the door opened slowly and a woman came in. I must have forgotten to fasten the outer door.

It was Mrs. Jonnes. She wore an oilskin cloak. I noticed this because she kept her hands hidden under it. Her face was white and her eyes were like red lamps.

"You're Dora Banford," she said.

Dora nodded.

And then the hands came into view and the shotgun. I snatched it from her before her fingers could curl around the trigger, and she dropped into a chair and burst into tears.

I don't exactly remember how I got them all three to the station, but when I got them there it looked as if my trouble was beginning, for whom to charge I did not know.

Jonnes' doctor saved me a lot of trouble next morning.

"The man died of heart failure, as I warned him he would," he telephoned me. "The wound was accidental—he probably pulled the trigger as he fell, and anyway it would not have killed a rat."

And so nobody hanged. Not Horace Angel, who went to burgle the safe with a key that he'd pinched or copied years before; not Mrs. Jonnes, who came after Dora with murder in her heart; nor Dora, who tramped to Hertford to settle accounts with the man who had broken her.

But the clues—gosh! I'll never get clues like those again!

The Most Mysterious Happening in My Life

AS RELATED BY

CHANNING POLLOCK

Author of "The Fool," "The Enemy," etc.

to

BIDE DUDLEY

CHANNING POLLOCK, playwright, lecturer and newspaperman, is what I would call a real "go-getter." He has a determination that never flags and behind it is a "will to win," backed up by great mental and physical force.

When he starts after anything it might as well capitulate and avoid a struggle, for Channing Pollock will get it in the end.

Mr. Pollock puts this dynamo of determination behind his plays.

Many authors are content to let their theatrical brain-children shift for themselves once they have landed on Broadway, but not so with Channing Pollock. He nurtures the child until it becomes a man and then continues the process until it assumes the proportions of a giant.

It was this Pollock energy that got behind the Pollock writing ability and made big successes of "The Fool" and "The Enemy."

However, all this is merely preliminary to my story.

THERE has been a mystery in the life of Channing Pollock for twenty-six years. He vows he will solve it some day.

Having read what I have said above about the Pollock determination, you will understand me when I say I am absolutely confident he will.

"My mystery concerns a woman," said Mr. Pollock recently, as we sat smoking in his New York office. "It might be called a 'mystery of sentiment' for it isn't important to anybody but me. To me, though, it is of such moment that I have made its solution one of the few big aims of my life."

"To me every woman is a mystery," I said lightly.

"Now don't put the wrong construction on my words," he replied. "Mine isn't a mystery that has to do with love. I am a happily married man and have been for years.

"This mystery is one I must solve in order to pay a debt. And it involves what I call 'the urge of gratitude.' In a nutshell, my mystery resolves itself into one question — 'Where is Nellie Knight?' "

He stopped to try to light the fresh

cigar I had just handed him. Failing, he continued:

"I came to New York in 1900 to look for work. I was a newspaperman, but I couldn't make the editors believe it—at first. My bankroll was so small it was almost invisible to the naked eye.

"However, I had to eat and sleep, so I went to a combination boarding and rooming house at 34 West 38th Street and parked my other shirt.

"Among the 'guests' in the house was a sweetly pretty girl, known as Nellie Knight. She said she was in the theatrical business, but I never learned just what her particular line was.

"Nellie was about twenty and rather reticent. We became casual friends and I am frank to say I liked her very much.

"My luck wasn't good. I managed to pick enough money by selling books to pay my board bill for the first two weeks and then I found myself flat broke.

"Two weeks later the landlady called me aside in the hall and said she would have to take my room away from me. I pleaded for time.

" 'I only owe you $14,' I said. 'I'll get it somewhere. If you put me out I'll have to sleep in the parks, and it's pretty chilly these nights.'

"She was adamant. 'Can't help it!' she replied. 'Pay tomorrow morning or out you go.'

"She turned abruptly and left me. I looked around. There stood Nellie Knight who was going out of the house. As she passed me she said: 'I'm sorry, Mr. Pollock.'

"I was confused and humiliated. It was only 7:30 P. M., but I went to my room and to bed. The next morning would see me homeless, but tomorrow was another day. I wasn't particularly down-hearted.

"Seven A. M. found me dressing and packing my meagre wardrobe. Suddenly I noticed something white sticking under my door. I pulled it in. It was an envelope containing five bills—a ten and four ones.

"There was a note, also, which read: 'Please let me help you. — Nellie Knight.'

"I had made up my mind not to accept Nellie's loan when, about 8 o'clock, there was a rap at the door. I opened the door and was confronted by the landlady.

" 'How about that money?' she demanded.

"My resolution as regards the loan left me. I handed her the $14.

" 'Oh, you got it, eh?' she said, showing hard satisfaction. I made no reply and she went away. "At breakfast I looked for Nellie Knight, who usually was at the table before 9. She was absent.

" 'Didn't Nellie get that new hat at your store?' asked a girl of a thin clerk named Taylor.

" 'Took it out yesterday,' he replied, 'but she told me last night she's returning it today. Can't afford it.'

"My heart sank and it was right there that I experienced what I call 'the urge of gratitude.' It was a fainting sensation coupled with a determination to pay Nellie back.

" 'Aw, what a shame!' said the girl at the table. 'An' she's been savin' a whole month for that hat. Musta had to send some more cash to that old dad of hers out in Pennsylvania.'

"I couldn't eat. Gloomily I sat there and cursed myself inwardly for accepting Nellie's loan. I gulped my coffee down and left the house.

"All day I hunted for work without finding it. At supper that night I wondered where Nellie was. She hadn't put in an appearance. Finally I decided to ask.

" 'She ain't here any more,' said the landlady. 'Left this morning.

Somethin's wrong, I guess, for she didn't look very cheerful.'

"The 'urge of gratitude' hit me again. Once more I couldn't eat and I found it hard to sleep that night.

"My luck changed next day. I found a job on a newspaper at a pretty fair salary. Now I was in a position to repay Nellie Knight, but I couldn't find her.

"In my spare time I hunted everywhere for her. I visited theatrical offices and asked managers if there was a Nellie Knight in any of their troupes. None of them had ever heard of her.

"I put an ad in the personal column of my newspaper, but it brought no results. Apparently she had dropped from sight completely.

"FOR seven years I went along without a clue as to the whereabouts of the girl. Then, one day, when I reached the office of a newspaper where I was employed, I was told a young woman had called to see me. That old 'urge of gratitude' came over me. It made me certain the caller had been Nellie.

"I can't explain why I had such faith in that 'urge,' so don't ask me. It was, and is, akin to the 'hunch' people sometimes have.

" 'She said her name was——' the doorman began.

" 'Knight?' I asked, interrupting.

" 'Yes, sir! She said she couldn't wait. Went away, leaving no address. Looked like she was sort o' sick.'

"I told him I'd give him $5 if he'd keep her there, provided she returned. He agreed, but Nellie never came back.

"A few months later I became a press agent for a theatrical attraction. One night, as I stood near the treasurer, in the box office of a Broadway theatre, I heard him end a phone conversation with, 'Thank you, Miss Knight.'

"Immediately that old 'urge of gratitude' came over me. I grabbed the phone, but was too late.

"What was her full name?" I asked excitedly of the treasurer.

"He was puzzled. 'Why,' he finally replied, 'she said she was Nellie Knight.'

" 'What's her address?'

" 'Never gave it. Said she'd call for the tickets.'

"I stayed in that box office until 10 P. M. Nellie didn't arrive and at 8:20 the treasurer sold her seats to another patron. I was terribly disappointed.

"I would have bet a year's salary that the woman who called was the right Nellie—my 'urge' told me she was. I didn't explain my nervousness to the treasurer, although he tried to 'kid' me into it.

"AFTER that there were various occasions when I thought I had a clue to the whereabouts of Nellie Knight, but with none of them came the 'urge of gratitude' so I placed little faith in them. Two months ago, however, I encountered the 'urge.'

"I was driving down upper Broadway in my car when, in a taxicab going the other way, I thought I saw Nellie Knight. It was then that the 'urge' came over me—and, frankly, I was certain I had seen Nellie.

"I ordered my chauffeur to turn around and overtake that taxi. He tried, but first he was delayed by the traffic and then his engine began to balk. The result was I had to give up the pursuit idea.

"The picture of the woman in that taxicab is still fresh in my mind. She looked about 45, but the features were Nellie's. I'd have given $500 to have overtaken her. But, I'll find her and pay her back.

"As I said before, my mystery is 'Where is Nellie Knight?' I'm going to solve it. Would you like to hear how?"

"Yes, indeed!" I said.

"Then listen! Within a year or perhaps eighteen months, I shall write a play, a comedy-drama based on that old boarding-house and Nellie Knight.

"I'll give it her name — 'Nellie Knight' isn't a bad title for a play— and I'll so construct the story that if Nellie Knight sees it she cannot help but understand its real mission. In addition, I'll pledge myself to pay to Nellie Knight, if the play locates her, one precent of the gross receipts for two years.

"If the play is a success it will make Nellie rich. Even if it is a failure it will pay her several thousand dollars in royalty, just the same—and I'm going to see that it isn't very much of a failure."

"It's a great idea," I commented.

"I think so, and I've got another in connection with it. Through the newspapers I'll let the public know that any woman whose maiden name is or was Nellie Knight, may have two seats for the play free at any performance. Then I'll arrange to have the box-office men notify me quickly each time a Nellie Knight accepts a pair of tickets.

"If their notification brings on the 'urge of gratitude' I'll know the right Nellie has entered the theatre. If it doesn't, I'll find out about the applicant for seats, anyway, just to be sure the 'urge' wasn't off duty when she called.

"I'm going to stir up so much noise about Nellie Knight with my 'Nellie Knight' play that she will have to be found."

"You might give a special performance for Nellie Knights and their relatives," I suggested.

"That's right—I might," he replied. "A special matinee."

"Why not make it an evening performance," I said, "and call it the play's 'Nellie night?' "

Mr. Pollock smiled.

"You can't keep from joking, can you?" he asked. "I noticed it when you gave me this cigar."

The Tenth Story of this Series
will be told by

Alice Brady

It will appear in our next issue —
Out June 15

Hedda Speaks

By SUSAN ERTZ

MELVILLE ADDISON was what a previous generation—less accustomed to rapidly made fortunes—would have called a self-made man, and what the present generation merely calls a successful one.

By the time he was forty-four he had made all the money he considered necessary for the thirty or so remaining years of his life; had been happily married, but had lost his wife during an influenza epidemic; and had crossed eight times to Europe.

He was now crossing for the ninth time, and, as usual, alone. His home was in the pretty country near Greenwich, Connecticut, and from his wooded hill-top he could see the pleasant waters of Long Island Sound.

Believing that for a man to retire from business without a hobby to interest him was to shorten his life by years, he began to fill that house with works of art, hunted down, personally inspected, and, if deemed worthy, purchased by himself.

He made mistakes, but he kept his good humor. He once bought on Fifth Avenue a Guardi that had been painted by a clever young Italian copyist in an attic in Verona the year before.

It was a long time before he discovered this, but when he did he only laughed. The picture remained on his wall, where he had hung it in pride and delight.

"An expensive but decorative mistake," he said, with a wave of his hand, "but luckily for these smart young fellows there's a fool born every minute."

He was a sociable, friendly man, popular, agreeable to look at, and fond of mixing with his kind. It was his opinion, frequently expressed, that you could learn Something from Everybody. What he learned from Mr. Henry Ostrander on that ninth voyage across the Atlantic changed his whole life.

He sat next to a man named Warner in the dining-salon and fell into talk with him at the first meal. Warner was a quiet man with pleasant manners and thoughtful eyes. He had read a good deal but knew nothing about pictures, and it was his first trip abroad. Nevertheless Melville Addison found him very companionable.

He particularly wanted, he said, to see the cathedrals of Europe, especially of England and France. Addison said he would like to show him Canterbury and they agreed to go there together, but owing to the following events this trip never materialized.

On the third day, after lunch, the two men were sitting side by side in their deck chairs. Warner had a book of poems in his hand which he opened from time to time, but for the most part they talked, or made comments on the people who were passing and repassing them.

A small man in a gray overcoat went by, walking briskly. There was nothing remarkable about his ap-

pearance in any way, but Warner saw him and started.

"That's Henry Ostrander!" he exclaimed, "as sure as I'm alive."

"Who's he?" Addison very naturally asked.

"You've never heard of him, I suppose. Lots of people haven't. He's the greatest, or one of the greatest mediums we've got. I went to one of his séances in New York only six months ago. But I don't suppose," he added, "you take any interest in this spiritualistic business."

"I don't know. Not actively, anyhow. Do you?"

WARNER hesitated, watching the retreating figure of the man in the gray overcoat.

"Yes, to a certain extent, I do. I was taken to two of his séances by a friend. I'd always wanted to go to Ostrander if I went to any. I went with a perfectly open, unprejudiced mind, and I must say I was very much impressed."

"What's his line, exactly?"

"Oh, the usual sort of thing, I suppose. He goes into a trance, and certain spirits—I don't know what else to call them—get possession of him and talk."

"Did they say anything worth listening to?"

"Well, that depends on what you mean. Some of the people there seemed to get in touch with their relations and friends; names were called and messages given.

"I can't say that struck me as altogether convincing. I can see how mind-reading might enter into that. What amazed me were the things that were prophesied."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what he said, or his control said, about things that were going to happen to people present."

"Did any of them come true?"

"Yes, that's the queer part of it. His favorite control, a Swedish girl, took quite a flattering interest in me. She said that my aunt—she gave her Christian name—would be killed in an automobile accident, and she was, about ten days after.

"She said I was thinking of lending a large sum of money to a friend to invest, and that I'd lose it, and sure enough I did lend it, like a fool, and I did lose it. She said a number of other things I can't remember now, but they were all true."

"That's extraordinary," said Addison. "What sort of a fellow is this Ostrander?"

"He seems very normal. He dresses, eats, talks, exactly like anyone else. He has a very nice wife and a young son. I went there twice. There were some materializations the second time. I don't pretend to understand it. But I know that Ostrander is as well known in England as he is in America, and I believe has submitted willingly to every sort of test."

"Could you introduce me?" Addison asked. "I've never met a medium. I'd like to talk to him."

"Surely. When he comes around again I'll speak to him."

When Ostrander appeared again Warner sprang up from his deck chair and spoke to him. He had to introduce himself, as Ostrander clearly did not remember him.

Then Melville Addison was introduced—"A friend of mine who is particularly anxious to make your acquaintance," Warner said, and with a smile and nod to Addison he went away and left the two together.

OSTRANDER was a thin, gray-haired man with prominent cheekbones and deep-set blue eyes. He was small, and his hands and feet were small, but at the same time he gave the impression of being muscular and

healthy. He had a very agreeable smile.

"Mr. Warner," said Addison, as, at Ostrander's invitation, he joined him in his walk, "has just been telling me about you. What he said interested me so much that I asked him to introduce me to you."

"That was very kind of him and of you," said Ostrander. "It was stupid of me not to remember him, but so many people, both in England and America, come to my meetings that I'm sorry to say I often forget their faces until I know them well."

"Are you an American?" Addison inquired.

"I am a naturalized American. I was born in London, of Swedish parents, and I went to America when I was little more than a child. I have a flat in London, though, near Dorset Square, as well as one in New York."

He spoke with simplicity and frankness, and Addison, who had a certain shrewdness or intuitiveness in regard to people, "took to him" at once.

"What interests me," he said, "is not so much the fact—I'm assuming it's a fact—that we can get in touch with the so-called dead, as that when you're in a state of trance, you, or your control, can foretell the future. Warner says that everything that was told to him came true."

"Ah, that was Hedda, I expect. She hardly ever makes mistakes."

"Who is Hedda?"

"Hedda is my Swedish control. She is very careful of what she says, and never exaggerates or gets carried away. She's a little mischievous sometimes, but if she says a thing will be so, it is pretty sure to be so."

"But, Great Scott," protested Addison, "if that's true, and I presume it is, it means that everything we do is destined; in other words, that we're mere puppets with no choice or free will at all."

"We always have choice and free will," Ostrander said with his attractive smile, "but there are those who are permitted to see what our choice will be, that is all.

"You chose to come to England this month. Hedda could have told you long ago that you would come to England this month. That doesn't alter the fact that you chose to come."

"Well, it's too much for me," Addison said. "I can't see it at all. Thirty years ago my father gave me a beating I didn't deserve, and I ran away from home with three dollars in my pocket. I remember going to the station and wondering if I'd go North or South to look for work.

"If I'd gone North, everything would have been different. I wouldn't have been here now. Why, there have been ten thousand things, big and little, that might have changed the whole course of my life."

"It simply depends," Ostrander answered, "on where you stand in regard to time. Hedda, when she desires, can look on either side of us. On our left, let us say, lies the past. On our right, the future. Where we happen to be standing at the moment is the present.

"She can as easily look to the right as to the left. But she is very extraordinary. Some controls are careless and speak without looking, but Hedda never does."

Addison shook his head.

"It's too much for me," he repeated. "Can you get hold of Hedda whenever you want to?"

"Provided I can get the right conditions. I must have a quiet room and a small circle. As a rule, darkness isn't necessary."

"You say we make the future," persisted Addison, "and yet you're trying to prove to me that it's already made."

"No, no," protested Ostrander, smiling, "I'm not trying to prove it. I try to prove nothing."

Addison went on:

"One thing seems to me to contradict the other. I suppose you wouldn't try and see if you could tell me anything?"

HIS eagerness was so apparent that Ostrander was won. He paused at the rail and looked at the low sky and the dark and lava-like sea.

"If you like," he said. "Of course it may not be very successful here. I don't feel as well on the ocean as I would like, and the trance state in addition to that—still, I might try. It will be an interesting experience for you, perhaps. You say you've never been present at a sitting?"

"Never, and I'd like to, immensely."

Ostrander said after a moment's silence:

"Come to my stateroom, then, number 164, at ten tonight. And bring your friend. Warren? Warner. I will ask a lady who sits at my table. I don't know her name, but we have spoken to each other once or twice. There ought to be five of us."

"It's very good of you," Addison said. "I've wondered a lot about these things, but they've never come my way before."

"A great many people," said Ostrander, "close their minds to them at once, unless they've had some experience of their own. And many never unclose them. I assure you, I've been called a charlatan and a liar often enough. Hedda gets so angry, poor girl."

"It sounds queer to hear you speak of her like that," exclaimed Addison.

"There's nothing queer about it," Ostrander told him. "It's only new to you. Please be very matter-of-fact tonight. It helps. And if they speak to you, answer them as you would answer me."

ADDISON was so excited at the thought of what he was to see and hear that evening that he ate little and drank nothing. Warner, during dinner, told him what to expect, and what the procedure was like. Then, as it was mild out, and almost windless, they walked the deck and smoked until five minutes to ten.

They found number 164, and discovered that they were the last to arrive. Three people were already in the stateroom, Mr. Ostrander, a middle-aged lady who was introduced as Mrs. Pelham, and a slender, good-looking young woman of perhaps twenty-eight or nine, whom Mr. Addison had noticed more than once.

Mrs. Pelham on being asked to come had suggested that she bring a ship-board acquaintance, with whom, oddly enough, she had been discussing spiritualism the day before. The younger woman's name was Miss Fellows. Both were English.

After the introductions were made, Ostrander said, smiling:

"We're a trifle cramped for space here, but I think we can manage. Let me see. Mrs. Pelham, Miss Fellows and I will sit on the sofa, and you and Mr. Warner will have to sit on the edge of the berth, if you don't mind."

They arranged themselves as he suggested, and all but Ostrander and Warner held hands. These two had, respectively, their left and right hands free, as Ostrander said he liked the circle to be broken at one point. Addison's left hand held Miss Fellows' right, and his right hand Warner's left.

"I wish we had a gramophone or a music box," Ostrander said. "Music helps very much. But at least we can have a song. Suppose we sing 'Abide with Me.' We all know that."

They sang one verse, Ostrander firmly and loudly, Addison and Warner with some embarrassment, Miss Fellows in a clear trained voice that was very pleasing, and Mrs. Pelham in an unmusical and uncertain quaver.

The electric light was dimmed behind a piece of thick brown paper, but Addison could see all the faces clearly enough, and all ten hands, too, were visible.

"Just talk to each other in the ordinary way," Ostrander told them, and Addison looked across at Miss Fellows' intelligent and attractive face and said:

"I suppose you've often done this sort of thing before."

"Never," she answered. "I've often read a good deal about it, and I've always found it interesting, but somehow, it hasn't come my way before."

"Nor mine," Addison said.

"What about you, Mrs. Pelham?" Warner asked.

"Oh," she answered, "I've had a great deal of experience. I'm very psychic myself. And ever since I was a child, I've done automatic writing."

Addison thought she was a type one frequently meets in hotels and pensions. He summed her up shrewdly enough. Of uncertain age, badly dressed, sad-looking, lonely, living, probably, on the smallest of incomes, he judged her to be the widow of an Indian Civil Servant, or of a professor.

She would be almost sure, he thought, to have a son in Canada, or a daughter married to a parson. She had dipped at different times into Christian Science, Theosophy, Spiritualism, and tried not to be bitter about life.

Her automatic writing would be a great consolation to her, and would give her, among her friends, a certain distinction.

Miss Fellows was a thoroughly nice young woman, independent, good-looking, unafraid, probably talented in some way.

"I guess I wont be much use at this séance," said Addison humbly. "I'm about as psychic as a ton of coal."

"As long as you don't break the circle it doesn't matter," said Ostrander. "And there are the most amazing properties in a ton of coal."

THEY all laughed at that, and the eyes of Addison and Miss Fellows met in the gloom.

"I feel a sort of electric current in both hands," said Addison. "Prickings, like little shocks. It's rather pleasant."

The others said they felt them too, and there was a general atmosphere of expectancy. Meanwhile the ship rolled moderately and not uncomfortably; the twin screws shuddered as they turned; the waves went hissing by, underneath the port-holes; and something creaked over their heads, the sort of creak inevitable in a moving ship.

The five of them sat there in the brown gloom, speaking at intervals, and Addison thought it the strangest experience he had ever had.

"Yes, we shall have results soon," said Ostrander presently. He spoke slowly, sleepily. "I am going away now."

"That means he's going into a trance," explained Mrs. Pelham, who seemed prepared, in the absence of Mr. Ostrander, to take charge. "We must go on talking. Tension is bad for everybody."

"I hope Hedda comes," said Warner. "Hedda's a marvel. It does me good just to hear her voice."

"T'ank you, nice man."

Out of the air, over their heads,

somewhere near the ceiling, Addison thought, came the Swedish girl's voice. The strangeness, the unexpectedness of it, seemed to jerk every nerve in his body, but his grasp of the two hands did not relax.

He looked at Ostrander. His eyes were closed, and he was leaning his head against the back of the sofa and breathing loudly and regularly. The voice had certainly not come through his lips, but high up over his head.

"Is that really you, Hedda?" asked Warner.

He spoke affectionately, as he would have spoken to a friend.

"Yas, dat's me. I tink you all look vary silly, I do. I ban laughing at you."

She did laugh, an amused chuckle, pleasant to hear.

"What a funny place for a meeting! Hanry bad man to make me come. Hanry ban sick, poor man. I not stay vary long."

They all looked at Ostrander, whose eyes and lips remained closed. His face was smooth and white, wiped of all expression.

"But you'll stay for a little while and talk to us, wont you?" Warner pleaded. "I met you in New York, you know."

"Yas," came Hedda's reply, and her voice had an indescribable quality of gaiety, "I remamber you. You silly man. You lend money to a bad man who lose it all."

She laughed again as at an exquisite joke.

"I know," said Warner. "You were perfectly right. I haven't forgotten."

"Have you a message for me, Hedda?" asked Mrs. Pelham. She spoke as an elderly governess might speak to a child who needed managing. "I would so like a message tonight, if you please. Something comforting."

"Tomorrow you ban seasick," was Hedda's reply. "Oh, vary, vary seasick."

"Oh, dear. Does that mean that we shall have a bad storm? Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

There was no reply. Hedda, it seemed, had conceived an instant dislike for Mrs. Pelham. She ignored her from that moment.

"I know Amy," she said suddenly.

A shiver ran up Addison's spine. He controlled himself, and his face gave no sign of his feelings.

"Do you know Amy? I'm glad. How is she?"

"Amy's all right. I like Amy. Amy says no message for you. She only say, 'Everything all right. Give love to Malville. That's all.' She glad you come, though."

"Couldn't she talk to me?" he asked.

"No. Amy got vary little power. Not like me. I got a lot of power. I touch you, good man."

ADDISON felt, against his neck, the touch of light fingers, but they were like fingers charged with electricity. Then Hedda laughed again, close to him.

"There. You feel?"

"I felt you," Addison said.

"That not easy, to touch someone," she said proudly. "I got lots of power tonight, but I not stay long. Hanry ban sick."

"Hedda dear, can't you give me any news of my husband?" Mrs. Pelham then asked. "I'd be *so* grateful."

She got no reply. There was an embarrassing silence, and they thought Hedda had gone away, but suddenly she burst out laughing.

"You nice man, you Malville," she said, "you hold your wife's hand now and don't know it. I t'ink dat vary funny."

"My wife's hand?" Melville Addison exclaimed. "Do you mean I'm

holding Amy's hand at the same time?"

"No, not Amy, you silly. Not Amy. Your new wife. I t'ink her name like Angel. She vary nice. I like her."

A dead silence fell then. At last Miss Fellows spoke.

"You're just making jokes, Hedda," she said. "My name's Angela, but I'm not Mr. Addison's wife. I'm not married to anybody."

Hedda laughed uncontrollably. Her girlish and unrestrained mirth there in that dim state-room, as the ship rolled and throbbed and the waves rushed by outside, never faded from Addison's memory.

"Oh, you silly Angel. I ban seeing you married to dat man. Not now. Maybe two, t'ree months, I guess. I like you, Angel."

Miss Fellows retained Addison's hand without a quiver.

"Well, it's very odd," she said, with good humor, "as I never met him before tonight."

Hedda ignored this.

"I wake up Hanry now," she said. "Hanry not ban well."

"Are you going, Hedda?" Warner cried. "Don't go yet."

"Wait," she said. "I touch you, nice man."

There was a moment's silence. Then:

"You feel?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Warner. "Thank you, Hedda. You touched my cheek."

"I k i s s e d y o u," she said, and laughed.

THEN a very different silence fell, like the silence that falls upon a room when someone very vital goes out of it and shuts the door.

Hedda, they knew, had gone. A personality had just been with them, fresh, childish, innocent, spirit-like, and it had left behind what was heavy and ponderous, to be seen and touched.

Warner, with a sigh, released his hand from Addison's and the circle was broken. Ostrander, his face working a little, moved; his eyelids flickered and then opened, and he sat upright.

They watched him, anxiously, and seeing their eyes fixed on him, he presently got to his feet with a smile.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well, Hedda came, a l l right," Warner answered. "She's as wonderful as ever."

Ostrander reached for the carafe and poured himself out a glass of water, which he drank thirstily.

"I think she was anxious about me," he said. "She watches over my health like a mother. I had a rather serious illness before I left New York."

"I do hope you don't feel any the worse for it," said Miss Fellows. "It's quite true, she was anxious."

Ostrander resumed his seat and passed a hand over his eyes.

"No, it hasn't done me any harm. Did she give you any messages?"

"She predicted a bad storm tomorrow," said Mrs. Pelham, a n d the others, feeling that she had received rather harsh treatment at Hedda's hands, let it go at that.

"She got my name," said Miss Fellows, "and Mr. Addison's name, and that of his wife. That in itself seems to me very remarkable. Personally, I'm most grateful to you."

"It was the most interesting experience I ever had," said Addison, and for the first time since Warner had removed the brown paper from the light, his eyes met those of Miss Fellows. Hers smiled reassuringly into his, as if to say:

"Don't worry. It hasn't upset me in the least. I shall think no more about it."

"No one can imagine what Hedda is to me," Ostrander said. "A combination of daughter and guardian

angel. She has never once failed me. I'm glad you were interested and satisfied, Addison.

"It was your eagerness that made me try the experiment. It might easily have failed, under these difficult conditions. Were any of you touched?"

"I was," said Addison. "It was extraordinary."

"So was I," said Warner.

"As far as I'm concerned," remarked Mrs. Pelham," "I found her a little disappointing. I usually get such interesting messages from people who have passed over, things of real import."

"She has her likes and dislikes," said Ostrander, "like anyone else, and for reasons I don't understand at all. Some of my sitters she'll talk to, and some she won't have anything to do with, and there's no making her."

Mrs. Pelham then began to tell them how popular she was with other controls, and the rest listened with bored politeness, and when she had finished, got up to go.

They all thanked Ostrander warmly. Warner and Addison said goodnight to the two ladies and then went together to the smoking-room for a drink and a talk. The ladies said good-night to each other then and there and went their separate ways.

"What a tiresome woman," thought Miss Fellows. "I almost wish I hadn't spoken to her yesterday, but if I hadn't, I wouldn't have gone to this séance, and it has been terribly interesting.

"I wonder if I'll see anything more of Mr. Addison? I must let him know that I think nothing of these prophecies, otherwise he'll be afraid that I might feel uncomfortable, and he'll avoid me."

"Purely a case of mind-reading, if it wasn't something worse," Mrs. Pelham said to herself as she went to her stateroom. "It was in the girl's mind, of course, as she sat there holding that man's hand, 'I wonder if this is the man I shall marry?' It's in every girl's mind these days, with men so scarce.

"The reason Hedda (or Ostrander) didn't like me was because I was sceptical of the whole business. I know the difference between a real séance and a fake one, and this one was undoubtedly very fishy."

BUT fishy or not, she had a miserable night, awoke at six, and rang for the stewardess. The ship was rolling heavily, everything in her stateroom was swinging and sliding, and she felt unspeakably wretched.

When the stewardess came she said she wanted to get up, that she must get up. The stewardess looked at her critically and said:

"You may as well try, Madam, but I don't advise it."

She did try, but it was a forlorn attempt, and ended disastrously. No one saw her the whole of that day.

Miss Fellows dressed quickly and was on deck by nine o'clock. Nothing, she felt, but the wind and the salty air would save her. She lay, warmly wrapped in rugs, in her steamer chair, which was lashed to the rail behind her, and she thought over the events of the night before.

She had no intention of either seeking out or avoiding Mr. Addison. On the whole, she liked him very much. She thought him honest, simple and straightforward; but Hedda (or Ostrander?) had certainly been misled, or had merely drawn a bow at a venture.

She had come to no conclusions as to the genuineness of the séance, although on the whole she was inclined to believe in it.

The night before, as they sat in the smoking-room, Warner had said to Addison:

"Even as an exhibition of mind-reading it was very remarkable, and personally I'm inclined to think it was very much more than that."

"Well, I was tremendously impressed until Hedda made that shot in the dark about me and Miss Fellows," Addison had answered. "It was too much like the sort of prophecy a gypsy makes when you cross her palm with silver.

"But just supposing for the moment," he added, "that it was a genuine foretelling of the future. Surely I can make up my mind to avoid it? Surely I need never see that young woman again unless I wish to? There's no reason why I ever should see her again. And then where would Hedda be?"

Warner laughed.

"Don't," he said. "It makes my brain reel. If it was a real foretelling of the future, as you were assuming, how can you possibly avoid it? If it isn't—but I wouldn't think too much about it if I were you."

"I can't help thinking about it," Addison admitted.

Warner asked, with some diffidence:

"Do you find Miss Fellows — attractive?"

"Yes . . . oh, yes, quite, on the whole." He added impatiently, "But hang it all, I shan't go near her now!"

And he had meant to keep his word, but he too sought the deck early and was surprised to find Miss Fellows already in her chair.

To pass her without stopping to speak would have suggested that he was afraid to stop and speak. He therefore paused, coloring noticeably, and steadying himself with a hand on the rail behind her, said "Good-morning."

She commented on the wild weather, and then said valiantly:

"I'm sorry Hedda made such an absurd prophecy last night. It almost destroyed my faith in her. But I suppose *they* are liable to mistakes like anyone else."

"Do you think it was all bunkum, the séance, I mean?" he asked.

"I don't know. I've been trying to make up my mind. I feel that Mr. Ostrander is honest, and that if there's any deceiving going on, he's deceiving himself. But I must say, there was something very convincing about it. Anyhow," she added, "it was intensely interesting."

Soon after that he changed the subject.

"I suppose you live in England?"

"Yes. I've just been to America on business."

"Business? May I ask what sort?"

"Yes. It's no secret. I'm a buyer. I buy pictures, on commission, for rich Americans and others. I've just been staying with one of the former on Long Island, helping him to arrange his collection. It's a very new collection. I bought every one of the pictures in it myself."

"Pictures!" exclaimed Addison, with mixed feelings. "Well, that's very interesting indeed!"

"This particular collection has meant four years' hard work. It's not very big, but it's very nice, if I do say it myself.

"I supose you think I'm too young to be an expert, besides being a woman; but my father was a famous connoisseur, and I've lived with pictures all my life. He taught me all he could, and I think I've inherited his flair, as well. Are you interested in pictures at all?"

"Am I?" he cried. "Why, pictures are my one hobby. Do you mind," he asked, indicating an empty chair next to her, "if I sit down here and talk?"

WHEN they parted, just before

lunch, the ship was rolling so heavily that they had difficulty in making their way along the deck, and very few people were about. Addison thought, as he ate his lunch:

"Well, the plot thickens. But good Lord, surely I can talk to a young woman about Tiepolo without marrying her. I shan't see her again after we leave Southampton."

They bade each other good-by as they left the ship. In spite of the fact that they had become good friends, and had had many interesting talks, nothing was said about a future meeting.

Miss Fellows, dressed in a beautifully made coat and skirt and the smartest of hats, smiled regretfully as she lost sight of him in the crowd.

"Hedda spoiled that," she thought, and she was sorry, for quite apart from marrying Mr. Addison she would like to have seen him again very much.

But she was a busy and practical young woman, and she made up her mind that she wasn't going to give herself any unhappy moments over it. And then, to their mutual surprise, they found themselves sitting opposite to each other in the train to London.

"How amusing this is," thought Miss Fellows. "I think the best thing to do is to treat the whole affair as a joke."

"How pleased Hedda must be to see us here," she added, and at that he laughed heartily.

"Well," he said, "I guess you're right. It's no use avoiding the subject. Let's get all the fun we can out of it."

"I've already had a great deal," she answered. "More than you know."

"I've been thinking of your feelings far more than my own," he told her, knowing that she had read his mind. "I can't help thinking that it must be very annoying for you."

"It isn't a bit," she said candidly. "I find it very amusing. It has added spice to the voyage."

"It has certainly done that," he admitted. Then he added, "Ostrander gave me his London address, and asked me to come to another meeting if I wished."

"He asked me, too. Will you go?"

"Will you?" he parried.

"No, I've had enough of séances. They're apt to be upsetting. I must keep my mind on my work now."

Her mind had been troubled, then, in spite of her composure. His heart beat faster at this, and when his eyes met hers, her look stirred him. Amazing! He was falling in love, or something very like it. Was it Hedda's doing, or was this coming to him anyway? He wished he knew.

He didn't mind falling in love; he liked it, like anyone else, but he hated to feel that he was only a puppet, jerked by hidden wires. He'd show Hedda yet that he had free will, confound her! He could still hear the tones of that fresh, childish voice:

"You hold your wif'es hand now, and don't know it. I t'ink dat vary funny."

ANGELA FELLOWS was looking away from him now, out of the window, and he seized the opportunity of studying her. She was certainly very attractive, and decidedly clever. She knew more about pictures in five minutes than he knew in a month.

And she was as sincere and frank a woman as he had ever met. He'd trust her with his buying any day, only he preferred, risky as it was, to have the fun of doing it himself.

When they arrived at Victoria she said with her slightly teasing smile:

"I expect it really is good-by this time."

He thought he must seem to her timorous, cautious, cowardly. He was in a quandary. Surely they could

meet again without thinking of Hedda? He made up his mind quickly. "Wont you please give me your address, and lunch with me one day? I'll tell you what I've bought, and what I'm thinking of buying."

"Willingly," she answered. "As a matter of fact, I think it's much wiser to arrange to meet. Otherwise we're almost certain to meet accidentally, and that would look so ominous to you, wouldn't it?"

"Let's try to forget all this Hedda business," he said. "It's spoiling everything."

He wrote down her address and they parted. And then, on thinking the matter over, he decided that the situation was insupportable for both of them, and that on the whole it was best that they shouldn't meet. So he tore up her address and tried not to think about her again.

But they moved in the same little world, a world that concerned itself with the buying and selling of pictures, and at the next big sale at Christie's he saw her. She saw him too, and laughed as she waved her hand.

"I've acted like a fool," he thought, as he went to meet her across the crowded sales-room.

"I hope we're not going to bid against each other," she said. "There are one or two things here I want badly."

He said there was just one thing he wanted badly, and he meant to have it.

"I know what it is."

"I expect you do. I told you once you were clever enough to read my mind."

"Oh, clever!" she murmured. "I don't know about that. Sometimes it's like a child's primer, that mind of yours."

She bid for a Cosway miniature and got it, and then for a small Reubens that had just come into the market, and lost it, and said she was glad. Then they found they were both bidding for a Peter Breughel.

"Give it up," she whispered to him. "My Long Island man's got his heart set on it, and I mean to bid high." She added, "Besides, I want him to have it."

He soon dropped out, for he saw she meant what she said. The picture was knocked down to her, and he said to her, afterward:

"It wasn't you I was bidding against, but that Croesus on Long Island. I'd gladly have given it up to you."

He presently began bidding for a Canaletto, which had been his second choice, but she scribbled something on a piece of paper and slipped it into his hand.

"Don't bid for it," she had written. "I'm certain it's not right. I've examined it very carefully."

He at once dropped out, and grateful to her for having saved him from a probable mistake, he put his pride in his pocket—his pride in himself as the maker of his own destiny—and asked her to dine with him. She was engaged for the next three evenings, but he secured her for the one following.

WHEN he left her that day he admitted to himself like an honest man that he was very much in love. Only second in strength to his passionate liking for and admiration of Miss Fellows was his disgust at realizing that he was following out Hedda's prophecy like a hypnotized hen whose beak is placed on a white chalk line.

A week later, Angela dined with him again. She looked very lovely that night, and Addison's mind was like a battle-field full of struggling armies. They had been at the table only twenty minutes when she exclaimed:

"I nearly forgot to ask you. Did

you by any chance see in the *Morning Post* yesterday that our friend Ostrander had been exposed, arrested, and was now out on bail?"

"What?" he cried. "Is it possible?"

"Perhaps you only read the *Times*. It wasn't in the *Times*."

"Well, that's the most exciting piece of news I've heard in years," he said.

"You little suspected that you were a free agent once more, and that the prophecy was as false as most prophecies are?" She laughed. "What a relief it must be to you! I can see it in your face. You're the most unchivalrous man I've ever known!"

"Yes, it's a weight off my mind," he admitted. "I feel ten years younger. Don't you feel happier too? Why, the knowledge that whatever I do I do because I want to do it and not because I'm just fated to—I'd rather have had this happen than have been left a million dollars."

"Really," she said, "if it had been foretold that your fate was to be broken on the rack, you couldn't have been more pleased at escaping it. Fortunately for you, I'm a good-tempered woman."

"I'm glad," he said, "because now I can ask you to marry me."

It was a long time before she would give him an answer. She said:

"Do you mean to tell me you love me, and yet that you'd have let your absurd pride, or whatever you call it, come between us?"

"I loathed the thought of acting like an automaton," he explained. "Oh, eventually, of course, I would have succumbed. I was bound to."

"You swear it?"

"I swear it."

She confessed that she had always wanted to marry someone she could see through, and that from the first she had liked him out of all proportion to his merits.

She accepted him, finally, and they clasped each other's hands under the table, during a long and emotional silence. Then, recovering herself, she said:

"You're the most gullible man I ever knew, Melville. No wonder people sell you duds now and then. My dear, there wasn't a word of truth in what I said about Ostrander. I didn't tell a lie either. I only asked a question, if you remember.

"There was nothing about him in the papers. I believe him to be as honest as the day. But your state of mind was really becoming unbearable, for both of us. I simply made it easy for you to succumb."

He gazed at her in ironic admiration.

"You're too damned clever, Angela."

"I know," she said meekly. "That's why you need me so."

He said good-night to her at the door of her flat in South Street. He was exceedingly happy, but perplexed.

"This business defeats me," he said. "Would we have fallen in love with each other if Hedda hadn't suggested it to us?"

"If we'd had the good fortune to meet I think we probably would. But then we probably wouldn't have met if it hadn't been for the séance."

"And you really believe the whole thing was genuine?"

"I don't know. Yes, I think I do. I think I want to think so. Anyhow, someone seemed able to look into the future pretty successfully."

"But what I can't make out is, was it the future, then? Or did we make it come true ourselves, once the idea was put into our heads? That's what I want to know."

"Well, you never will," she said, and kissed him.

Still Within the Law

By BAYARD VEILLER

Author of "Within The Law," "The Thirteenth Chair," etc.

THIS three-part story by the author of "Within the Law" and "The Thirteenth Chair" is an event of first importance in magazinedom. Almost everyone who has ever been inside a theatre has seen or heard about "Within the Law." Few plays and stories have received such tremendously popular approval as this great melodrama of Bayard Veiller's. And that Mystery Magazine is privileged to afford its readers an opportunity to read this latest of Mr. Veiller's legal dramas is a source of pardonable satisfaction to the editors.

CHAPTER I.

PRELUDE

MARY TRAVIS kissed Dick Sinclair. It was a solemn, intense kiss. Then they drew closer together, which to an observer would have seemed impossible. Then they kissed again.

"When did you first begin to——"

"I've loved you always," said Mary, and she thought it was true.

"So have I," said the boy. "Think of the time we've wasted."

"I know," sighed Mary from the decrepitude of her twenty years.

The young lovers did not hear the lovely music which floated in to them from the open doorway, nor the somewhat heavy step of the girl's father as he came into the conservatory and stood watching his daughter in her lover's arm.

As they kissed once more Mr. Travis smiled somewhat grimly. Then his smile softened as he spoke his daughter's name.

The girl did not turn. She buried her face against her lover's shoulder and held out a defiant hand toward her father. It was a lovely hand—long, slim-fingered, almost like a flower. The diamond which glistened on the third finger spoke eloquently enough.

Travis gave the ring one glance, seized the wrist held out toward him and dragged his daughter into his own arms. She looked up at him happily and he kissed her hungrily, intensely. Then he held out a welcoming hand toward young Sinclair.

None of them spoke, but they all beamed, one on the other, and finally laughed together happily and contentedly. Then all three began to talk at once.

CHAPTER II.

WHITE GLOVES

HENRY SINCLAIR, standing in the doorway of the ballroom, gave a sudden start. Then he lounged even more easily against the wall and with his

hands in his pockets watched the dancers. One couple alone seemed to interest him. The woman, a pretty little thing, who talked and laughed gaily with her partner, seemed a negligible quantity. The man, however, was the focal point of Sinclair's fixed look. Tall, well built, dressed with infinite care, Boris Morton was an attractive figure. Women adored him. Men liked him well enough. Some men thought his eyes were too close together; others hated his full lips, which always smiled.

He was suave, plausible, charming and nearly always unruffled. When the dance ended Sinclair stopped Morton as he walked alone past him and, slipping his arm through that of the younger man, led him toward his own study. For a moment Morton watched his host with a little puzzled frown which changed suddenly into a smile and then a chuckle as the older man spoke of the "little something choice" he had to show the other.

Laughing and talking together, the two men walked into the room which the elder Sinclair had made singularly his own.

AS the door closed there came over Sinclair's face the look which Wall Street dreaded. It was hard, relentless, bitter. He turned toward the other man with outstretched hand.

"Now, you thief, hand it over."

Morton tried first denial, then evasion; then he became indignant. In the end he sullenly dropped a pearl necklace on the desk by which he was standing. Sinclair picked it up.

"I'll see that this is returned," he said quietly.

Morton's eyes lit with quick relief. At this Sinclair turned on him.

"You're my guest and I want no scandal here."

"I thought you wouldn't," said Morton.

"Pack up and get out. You've till morning. Then I'll notify the police."

Morton stared at him; the threat was too sudden. Then he broke.

He pleaded, raved, promised reform, while Sinclair looked on grimly and said no word at all.

Finally, wearied of the scene, Sinclair walked to the door and opened it.

"You'd better hurry," he said, quite casually.

Morton lurched out. Then, with a quick look around, he pulled himself together, managed to get out a half-hearted laugh that would have deceived only a casual onlooker and hurried up the broad stairway toward his room. That laugh seemed an unnecessary gesture, for no one saw Morton as he left the room; it had its effect, however, for it stiffened the backbone of the man and by the time he had reached his room he had stopped trembling.

His brain was racing. Hurriedly made plans were as hurriedly thrown aside. He faced exposure, probably arrest; certainly the loss of all that his careful years of planning had made possible for him.

He walked to the door of a closet, took down a walking suit from its rack, and held it for a moment as he thought and plotted. Then there came to him a scheme for the one way out. He put back the clothes and shut the closet door with a decisive little slam.

His movements became definite, alert. The top drawer of his bureau was pulled out. Underneath a disordered pile of handkerchiefs and neckties, an ugly, short-nosed automatic glinted blackly. Morton stared at the weapon. He craftily weighed every chance; the crowded room, the music, all seemed to work in his favor. Jazz would drown even the crashing sound of the pistol. If not, the dancers, hearing the shot, would

stop in amazement long enough to let him get out of the room.

He picked up the weapon and began to polish it carefully with a silk handkerchief. There must be no betraying finger-prints here.

THE return of the stolen necklace took but a short time. Sinclair had hardly walked onto the dancing floor holding the softly-shining thing high in the air before it was claimed by an astonished girl who had not even noticed its disappearance.

There he was joined by Travis. As the two men talked Sinclair's boy and Travis's girl swayed past in each other's arms. As he saw the rapt look on their faces, Sinclair chuckled and turned to his friend. The glances of the two men met in complete, delighted and amused understanding. For a moment they did not speak, but turned and watched the lovers. Mary waved a smiling greeting, held up her hand for Sinclair to see and then turned happily once more to the man she loved.

The fathers, grinning widely, arm in arm, walked into Sinclair's study. There they looked ahead. Mothers aren't the only ones to plan for the future of their children.

Morton came slowly down the wide stairway. He was unruffled, urbane, smiling. It was all wasted. No one saw him. Nor was there any one to notice an ugly black smudge across the palm of his white glove. Black grease from a black pistol.

For a moment he stood on the bottom step, looking off at the dancers. He was either saying farewell to all that the scene meant or making safe the place he had earned so skillfully. There was nothing of indecision in his movement. One glance took in the ball-room, the hall, the stairs, his way of approach and of escape, and then, turning, he quickly made his way toward Sinclair's study.

Travis, standing with his back to the door, was laughing at Sinclair's plans for the future of their children and grandchildren. Over his friend's face there came a quick look of consternation. Before he could speak, his hand half-raised in a pointing gesture, there was a sharp, brittle bark; a small black hole appeared suddenly on Sinclair's shirt front, and the Wall Street magnate toppled over on his face across the table.

Travis, stunned out of all coherent thought, rushed to his friend's aid. He didn't see the hand in its smudged white glove toss the smoking automatic on the floor halfway across the room, nor did he either hear or see Morton as the latter softly closed the door behind him and moved out of sight behind a heavy window curtain.

MORTON'S plan had worked even better than he had hoped. The sound of the shot was heard in the ballroom. It brought nothing but confusion. Young Sinclair shouted for the music to be stopped and stood waiting for a second shot before his mind worked clearly. Then he sprang toward the door of his father's room, followed by a fighting, surging mob of panic-stricken men and hysterical women.

Travis had but one thought—help for his old friend. He was only dimly conscious of what had happened. He could only grasp the awful fact that Sinclair lay face down across the table, while blood oozed along the table top and began to drip slowly to the floor. Finding that he could do nothing for the wounded man, Travis laid him down gently and rushed toward the door to get help.

Before he could reach it, however, the door was thrown open and young Sinclair rushed into the room. Back of him crowded their guests.

For a moment the boy stood staring at his father's body.

Then he became conscious of Travis, almost hysterical, his clothing disarranged, his white gloves covered with ugly red stains. All this he sensed as he rushed toward his father.

And at that moment, Morton moved quietly from behind his hiding-place, dashed upstairs two steps at a time and, still unseen, gained his own room. Tearing off his gloves and throwing them into a closet, he turned and ran rapidly downstairs once more.

During this time, young Sinclair had discovered that his father was dead. Without speaking, he walked past Travis toward the door. He hardly saw Mary who had followed him into the room and was now standing beside her father. Still without a word, the young man went to the doorway and held wide the door in silent invitation for the others to go.

"My father has been murdered," he said tonelessly.

Into this scene Morton crowded his way.

"I heard a shot," he said breathlessly.

He gestured widely with his bare hands. Back in his mind was the thought that perhaps, later, some one would remember that he alone, in all that crowd, was gloveless.

"What's happened?" he went on, as he crowded closely into the doorway. His start of surprise and horror was admirably done.

"Good God," he cried, "how terrible!"

And the murderer turned away from the sight of his work with a horror which needed no simulation.

WHEN he had closed the door, young Sinclair stood for a moment. Then he turned and opened it once more.

"Oh, Morton," he called.

Without speaking Morton came to him. He felt that this was the time for that silence which is golden. He showed none of the fear that beset him. There was no indication of the panic in which his heart raced; his face was calm and showed only the perfect semblance of a great concern for the boy who stood, white-faced and haggard, in the door of his father's study.

"Would you mind calling someone from the police," Sinclair said.

Then he closed the door and turned back into the room.

"I can't seem to realize it"—with a pitiful little gesture he turned toward the girl he loved—"but I suppose it's true. My father really is dead?"

Mary went to him, her ams about him, as she hoped they would always be; her cheek pressed closely to his.

All she said was: "Oh, my dear, my dear!"

To the man it seemed entirely adequate.

With the girl still in his arms he turned to her father.

"Will you tell us, please, exactly what happened?" he said, with grave politeness.

There was no hint of suspicion in his tone, but Mary gave him a quick glance before she turned to her father.

Travis recounted in detail all that he knew of the murder.

"And when I came into the room——" began the boy when the older man had finished.

"I was coming for help," interrupted Travis.

Sinclair considered this.

After a pause he went on: "My father said nothing, did nothing to show that any one else had come into the room?"

Travis shook his head.

"You heard no one behind you?"

"No one."

There was an almost inperceptable pause, then the boy continued:

"All you heard was the shot; my father fell and you ran to him?"

Travis looked at the boy keenly.

"I have already told you all that," he said slowly.

"I know, sir, but I'm puzzled. I can't quite understand it. I should have thought that you'd have turned almost automatically at the sound of the shot right behind you."

Travis thought over this.

"I don't believe I was conscious of any sound," he said finally. "I saw your father was wounded and of course ran to him."

"And you didn't look back?

"Must I tell you that again?" retorted the other.

There was a little edge, an added crispness, to his voice.

The girl stepped a little distance out of her lover's arms and looked from one man to the other.

The timbre of Sinclair's voice was slowly changing; it hardened, became more metallic as he retorted quickly, "You mustn't blame me for wanting to know how my father died."

"I had no such thought," said Travis.

There was an awkward little pause. The girl slowly began to sense the tension between her father and her lover.

"If you had only turned when you heard that shot," said the boy doggedly.

"Dick," cried the girl, "why do you keep harping on that? Dad said he didn't turn. He's told you that again and again and you keep coming back to it. Why?"

"Because, my dear," he said grimly, "it's almost impossible for me to believe."

CHAPTER III.

ARREST

THE police were even more sceptical. For an hour Captain Leslie questioned and cross-questioned Travis, while his daughter stood beside him, her hands clasping one of his.

It was Leslie who first saw the revolver which had fallen under a chair; Leslie who made the tests for finger-prints, and found none; Leslie who pointed grimly to Travis's gloved hands and remarked that gloved hands left no finger-prints; Leslie who dragged from the reluctant Sinclair his vague suspicions, and finally Leslie who stolidly arrested Travis for the murder of his friend.

MARY clung to her father until the doors of the prison closed between them. After the first horror of his arrest, the girl quickly regained her courage and laughed and joked with him through the long drive in the early morning hours which ended at the prison doors.

To the boy who insisted on accompanying them she said nothing. For the time, her only thought was of her father. Once Travis tried to tell her that he was not guilty, but she stopped his speech with a kiss and then boasted that she would have him at home again within a few hours. Father and daughter were both laughing as he waved his hand to her and walked into the prison.

Each thought he or she had deceived the other. Both had failed.

CHAPTER IV.

MOTIVES

IT was not until she reached her own home that the girl's courage left her.

Still in evening dress, she stood in the library of her father's house

and faced her bewildered lover to whom she had spoken but once on the long drive.

The early morning sunlight streamed into the room, casting long lanes of brilliant light across the floor. Neither the boy nor the girl noticed this. They stood, two young things facing the tragedy which had beset them. Frightened, bewildered, they clung together. The girl went into her lover's arms with a little sob of exhaustion and pressed her young body against his as if to gain strength and courage from this contact which was so new and thrilling to her.

Then they kissed each other slowly and solemnly.

"Now you must go," she said after a brief time, "you have things to do. Terrible things." She ran into his arms again.

"Oh, my dearest, what can I say to comfort you?"

"Or I, you?" he said quickly.

"You don't believe that Dad——"

"Of course not," he interrupted.

"I love you," she said with a sob.

They kissed again and then she pushed him gently from her.

IN the arrest of a man of William Travers' importance for the murder of a man many times a millionaire, the young District Attorney saw wonderful possibilities. His ambitions soared; he saw visions ending only in the White House; sometimes his prophecies modified and he contented himself with some such trifling reward as the Governorship of the state.

By no strange mental quirk, the case became entirely personal to him. It was no longer the state against a man of hitherto spotless reputation, accused of murder on purely circumstantial evidence. On the contrary, it was "*my* big chance," "*my* wonderful opportunity," "the making of *me*." All this, of course, in the secluSion of his own home, more often in the still deeper solitude of his mind. To outward appearance he was the fair-minded, vigilant and hard-working public servant. He took occasion to repeat again and again the burning, if somewhat bedraggled, words he had dragged from the charnel house of the bromidic on the night of his election to office—"the function of the District Attorney is not to convict; it is to make sure that each man shall be considered innocent until a jury of his peers shall decree otherwise."

And so saying again, the District Attorney left no stone unturned to secure the trial and conviction of his prize prisoner in the newspapers weeks before he went about the more restricted effort to secure his legal conviction in a criminal court.

So Mary found that instead of immediate release her father faced a waiting period in prison and a sensational trial at its end.

Her appeals to the District Attorney were of course fruitless.

He was urbane, solicitous and seemingly eager to help. His kindness spread like a net about her; she was made free of the prison, every rule of restraint with which her father was surrounded was set aside for her. All this the newspapers duly exploited.

His own personal organ, instigated in a roundabout way, attacked him violently for his alleged favoritism. This served to bring an indignant protest from the ambitious young lawyer in which he again pointed out that accusation is very far from conviction—a protest so written that at the end the reader dropped his paper with the feeling that here was a young lawyer who was showing unusual kindness to a man whom he would later on be compelled to convict and send to a shameful death.

And that was that.

IN her daily visits to her father, Mary was a gay, smiling and amused young woman. She joked with the jailers; she made fun of her father; she laughed at the predicament in which he found himself.

At home, she cooked with her own hands every mouthful of food he was to eat.

To the outer world she was a serene, self-confident young girl, waiting her father's release from what at worst was an unfortunate mistake on the part of the police and the courts.

No one saw the sad, tragic-eyed girl who, alone at night, faced the truth and knew the desperate odds against which she fought.

The gray-haired old lawyer, wise in the way of crime and criminals, bitter and vindictive under the simulation of an urbane tolerance, had forced the truth on her. He had brushed aside all her arguments, turned her face to face with the stark reality.

"You must free my father," she had said to him.

The old man merely nodded and smiled the slow sardonic grin he reserved solely for his clients to whom he invariably told the whole truth.

"I can't do it alone," he said; "perhaps you and I can manage it together."

For the first time fear had come to her. She stared at the lawyer incredulously.

"But there can't be any doubt about it," she cried; "Dad's entirely innocent."

"Who says so?" snapped the lawyer. "You do, and you don't know whether he is or not. You think he is, you believe he is, but you can't prove it. He says he did not commit this crime. Who's going to believe him? You and I? That's not enough. Every known fact points to his guilt. We've got to face these facts. "Understand? Face the facts."

He walked over to where she was sitting and stood looking down at her bowed head. For a moment he permitted himself the luxury of a kindly glance. If Mary had looked up suddenly she would not have recognized the kindly, benign old gentleman staring down at her. Any member of the bar would have warned her that he was at his most dangerous best. She was getting his "jury manner" raised to the *nth* degree. It was all wasted, for the girl did not look up, but sat lost in the shelter of her own tragic thoughts.

"IN order to save your father," he went on finally, "we must work together. There are certain things for me to do and other things that only you can do."

The girl looked up at him more hopefully and nodded.

"From you I must have unquestioned obedience——"

"But suppose," interrupted the girl, "that I don't——"

"There's nothing to suppose," he said very quietly. "It's that or another lawyer."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Mary.

The old man took the girl's hand in his and drew from her finger her engagement ring. He held the glittering token in the palm of an outstretched hand.

"This must go back to young Sinclair today." He waved aside her unspoken objection. "Return it without any explanation whatever."

Again he silenced her with a gesture.

"There must be no explanation either now or later. You are not to see him under any circumstances until after your father's trial."

"I can't do that," said the girl; "we

love each other. We're going to be married and——"

"Going to be married," echoed the attorney with a snort. "Are you going to be married when his testimony sends your father to the electric chair?"

His fine flare for histrionism carried him to a dazzling menace. He turned on her wildly, one short stubborn forefinger pointing at her like an automatic.

"Love each other?" Purposely his laugh was ugly. "From this minute you'll stop loving the young whelp. You'll give all your love and all your devotion to your father."

Mary rose slowly and held out her hand for the ring.

"Well?" asked the lawyer.

"I'll send it back," said the girl.

"Without a word of explanation?"

"Without a word of any sort," said Mary Travis.

CHAPTER V

THE LEGAL MACHINE

AS the District Attorney began his opening address at the trial of William Travis for murder he felt that he was laying a sure foundation for his future as Governor of the State.

Mary, sitting beside her father, his hand held firmly between the palms of hers, watched him. She was struck at once with the moderation with which he spoke, and turned with a smile to her father's attorney, only to be confronted with a stony mask on which sat a saturnine grin of understanding. The old man knew what the District Attorney was aiming at.

"Let no guilty man escape," smiled the District Attorney, "is a most admirable rule for a prosecutor. We pay heed to it here; but, gentlemen, we have a rule more inviolate than that in my office: The innocent shall not suffer for the guilty!"

To give weight to his next statement the young man leaned far over the rail of the jury box. He spoke slowly and with great solemnity:

"If I did not believe in my heart and in my mind in the absolute guilt of this man, he would not be on trial."

Travis's lawyer was chuckling as he rose to voice an objection.

"May it please the court," he said with a deep-throated laugh, "we object. Usually I am greatly diverted by the beliefs and opinions of this ambitious youth. Under ordinary conditions, I could listen to him talking for days, or what at least seem days, to me.

"But, Your Honor, my old friend here is being tried for murder on the flimsiest coil of circumstantial evidence ever arranged by a boy who wants to be Governor of this Sovereign State——" The wily old campaigner paused for an interruption.

The District Attorney lost his head, fell into the trap, and objected wildly. He protested too much, and the older man sank back into his chair with a smile which seemed to be a personal message to each man on the jury.

"Had him there, didn't we?" was the thought he telegraphed with his eyes.

The judicial mind is incomprehensible to the layman. Old Judge Knott, with no serious thought of the plight of the man on trial, was intensely amused at the verbal clash of the two men. He was reclining in his chair, his head tilted back, looking with interest at the prone figure of Justice on the ceiling.

He swallowed a laugh and, with an extra judicial tone which concealed his amusement, said: "Proceed with the case."

POLICE CAPTAIN LESLIE was permitted to leave the stand without cross-examination. His testimony was direct, clean cut. He was allowed to tell everything that he saw,

to describe the arrest of the prisoner, but the objections of the defense prevented his giving his reasons for arresting Mr. Travis.

The coroner's physician, qualifying as an expert, described the wound as that caused by a thirty-eight calibre steel-jacketed projectile, and said that the bullet passing through Sinclair's heart had caused instant death.

There were no powder marks on the white shirt of the deceased. For this reason the pistol had probably been fired at a distance greater than eight feet. No questions.

Captain Leslie, recalled, told of the discovery of the automatic on the floor.

"This it?" asked the District Attorney, as he picked up the weapon from the table at which he was standing.

Here his acting was perfection. He held the ugly black thing gingerly in his hands, regarding it with well-simulated horror, and then passed it over to the policeman.

"Yes," said Captain Leslie, "that's it."

"Find the owner?" Leslie shook his head.

"That's bad," said the District Attorney, "very bad."

Then, after a pause, during which the counsel for the defense, every nerve alert, waited for the next step in the campaign of prosecution, he said most casually:

"Oh, by the way, Captain, what did the finger-prints show?"

"There were no finger-prints," said Captain Leslie.

Well-assumed astonishment on the part of the District Attorney.

"No finger-prints," he repeated.

Then, after a pause, his question crackling with its own intensity, "How do you account for that?"

The carefully rehearsed witness paused to give an added weight to his answer.

"There's only one possible explanation," he said slowly.

"And that is?" interrupted the District Attorney.

"The murderer of Mr. Sinclair wore gloves," said the police captain.

"No question about that, is there?"

"None whatever."

THERE was a pause, while the District Attorney walked the length of the counsel's table and back to the witness chair. The members of the jury leaned forward. There was no question as to their interest.

Mary Travis, knowing what the next question would be, leaned a little nearer to her father and pressed his hand reassuringly.

"Tell the jury the condition of the murderer's hands when——"

Mary's cry of indignation stopped the District Attorney for a moment. She looked anxiously at the old lawyer at her side.

He was leaning back in his chair and chuckling. Without rising, and still with an amused note in his voice, he shook an admonishing finger at the District Attorney and drawled:

"Oh, naughty, naughty!"

Then he lumbered to his feet and, walking slowly over to the jury box, he leaned on its rail, half facing the jury and half toward the judge.

His voice indicated only tolerant amusement as he addressed the court.

"May it please Your Honor," he said slowly, "we must of course make every allowance for the youth and lack of experience of the energetic young District Attorney, but we do feel that there are limits even to our indulgence."

He turned and flashed his wide smile at the jury and then said with a chuckle: "We can't allow him to count his chickens before they are hatched."

Three members of the jury guffawed loudly. They raised chickens and knew the futility of counting eggs. The wily old attorney thrust another engaging glance at the jury box and walked back to his seat.

There was a dull flush on the face of the younger man as he snapped at his witness: "What was the condition of Mr. Travis's hands when you arrested him?"

"He was wearing white gloves. They were blood-stained."

The District Attorney flashed a look at Mr. Travis, and then, with a little grin, he nodded to the opposing council.

"Your witness," he said.

"No questions," said the old lawyer, as he slowly rose and moved even more slowly toward the jury box. "May it please the court," he said in that deadly drawl of his, "I do not propose to take up the time of this court with a needless cross-examination."

"We admit the incriminating fact that together with fifty or sixty other men at this dance"—here his voice fell to a sepulchral whisper as he continued—"Mr. Travis wore gloves."

The ripple of laughter which ran through the courtroom at this bit of histrionism was stilled by the impassioned gesture of the speaker as he continued: "And we even go so far as to confess that they became stained with the life blood of his dearest friend as he rushed, horror-stricken, to his aid."

"But we object to counsel's making a speech at this time," shouted the District Attorney.

"Sustained," said the judge.

Travis's attorney bowed slightly and cast another meaning glance at the jury, which said plainer than words: "They'll take that out of the record, but we'll remember it just the same, won't we?"

Then he dropped into a chair beside Mary Travis.

IT was not until the next morning that the District Attorney was ready for the sensational part of his trial. By that time the entire groundwork of his case had been established. After the testimony of one or two unimportant witnesses, the District Attorney whispered his instructions to a court attendant, who hurriedly left the room.

There followed a portentous silence, broken only by the creaking boots of the attendant as he returned from his errand and the nervous cough of some woman in the body of the courtroom. The District Attorney looked at the jury as if to apprise them of the interesting moment to come. And then there was that sudden stiffness and stillness which comes over a gathering of people in anticipation of some thrilling event, the nature of which they only surmise.

And at that moment young Sinclair walked into the courtroom. It was his first appearance at the trial. He was thin and haggard, and the pallor of his face was accentuated by the deep mourning in which he was dressed.

Without turning her head, Mary knew that her lover had come into the room. She looked at him quickly as he passed her on his way to the witness stand, and then suddenly she turned away from him and buried her face in her hands.

Her heart cried out to her, "How sad he is! I must go to him. I have hurt him terribly." Then she felt the pressure of her father's hand on her arm, and she raised her head and sat staring at the man she loved as he swore to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

ACROSS the intervening space, over and through the interposing bodies of

attendants and attorneys, these two young lovers looked at each other. For the first time in months their glances met. Then, with a barely suppressed sob, Mary turned again to her father. Fifteen pages of the transcript of this trial were devoted to questions and answers which seemingly had little bearing on the case, but even the shrewd old lawyer who was defending Travis admitted that he had never seen a more careful or more skillful handling of an important witness.

But the record is a bare transcript of question and answer, leaving all the essential and important things to be guessed at. The looks, the smiles, the tones of the voice, the hundred-and-one subtle ways of saying one thing and meaning another, and then conveying the meaning with a glance to twelve different men, are the important things in a trial the records do not show.

"You were dancing with Miss Travis and suddenly stopped. Why?"

"I heard a shot."

"Then what did you do?"

"I ran through the ballroom toward my father's study."

"Why did you go there?"

"It sounded as if the shot had come from there."

"Were you alone?"

"I don't know. I think Miss Travis and some of the others followed me."

"Before you go on and tell the jury exactly what you saw, I want to ask you one more question. You say you ran at once toward your father's study. Were you up to that time in any way apprehensive for him? I mean, had he ever to your knowledge been threatened by anyone?"

"No," said the witness, "I do not believe that father had an enemy in the world."

"Now, go on and tell the jury exactly what you saw."

Before the witness could speak, however, the District Attorney stopped him.

"There is one more question I want to ask you before you go on. How long was it from the time you heard the shot until you reached the point from which you could see the door of your father's study?"

"I saw it as soon as I left the danceroom."

"About how many minutes was that after you heard the shot?"

"It wasn't minutes at all," said the witness, "about three or four seconds. That's all."

"Then it would not have been possible for anyone to have fired the shot and killed your father and made his escape from the room without your seeing him?"

"Objection," said counsel for the defense dryly.

"Sustained," mumbled the court.

A SHRUG of the shoulders from the District Attorney and a glance at the jury, which said to them: "You see how they restrict me. You see how hard it is for us to get at the facts." Then he resorted to another trick of the courts.

"Your Honor," said the District Attorney, "I was merely trying to prove by this witness that it would not have been possible for the murderer of Mr. Sinclair to have made his escape after this foul deed without having been seen by the witness."

Before the defense could frame an objection the court interposed: "The jury will disregard the remarks of the District Attorney as to what he was trying to prove."

Another look of resignation was quickly manufactured by the District Attorney and placed on view of the jury. He added to this a tone of injured resignation as he turned to his witness.

"Mr. Sinclair, will you please tell

the jury exactly what you saw and what you did after you heard that shot?"

All that the boy saw at this moment was the bowed head of the girl he loved. Mary did not look up, but sat by her father, holding his hand. She was torn by conflicting emotions. Her loyalty to her father demanded the condemnation of this man, who seemed bent on destroying him, and her love for young Sinclair cried aloud for her pity and her forbearance. She wanted to go to him and hold him in her arms to comfort him. Instead, she coughed and turned toward her father. And all that the boy saw was the turning away.

As he began to speak his voice was so low that a member of the jury leaned forward and cupped his ear with his hand in an effort to hear. The judge told him to speak louder.

"As soon as I heard the shot," said young Sinclair, "I ran toward father's study. The sound seemed to come from there. The door of the study was closed and, as I was about to open it, it was opened from the inside, and I nearly ran into Mr. Travis, who had opened it. The first thing I saw was my father lying face downward across his desk. I ran to him, but he was dead."

The boy stopped speaking and sat staring straight ahead. To the minds of the jury he was conjuring up a vision of his dead father. What the boy really saw was the girl he loved as she turned away from him and buried her face against her father's shoulder.

CHAPTER VI

"CREDIBILITY"

WHEN the silence became so strained that it was about to lose its effectiveness, the District Attorney cut in:

"When you saw your father was dead, what did you do?"

"I sent for the police," said the boy wearily.

"Whom did you send?"

"I don't know," said the witness. "Someone. I had sent everyone out of the room except Mr. Travis and Miss Travis, but my friends were crowded outside the door, and when I realized that my father had been killed I felt that the police should be notified. When I opened the door someone spoke to me, but I do not remember who it was."

"Then what did you do?"

"I closed the door and we waited."

"We? Who are *we?*"

"Mr. Travis, Miss Travis, and myself."

"Did you question Mr. Travis?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

Before answering the boy moistened his lips, and the knuckles of his hands which grasped the arms of the witness chair showed white against the rest of the hand.

"He told me," said the witness huskily, "that he and my father had been talking together. They were laughing and joking, he said. Then he said he heard a shot from behind him and saw my father fall across the desk, and he ran to him. He said that he had lifted my father to his feet, but that my father had been shot through the heart and that he was dead."

"Did he say that he had been shot through the heart?"

"I don't remember. He may have merely said that he was shot and was dead. You see, father was shot through the heart, and I can't seem to get that out of my mind."

"What did he say in regard to his opening the door as you were about to come into the room?"

"He said that he was coming for help."

"What did you think about that?"

"Oh, we object to what the witness thought."

"I will put the question in another way, then," said the District Attorney. "When he said that he was coming for help, what did you say?"

"I don't think I said anything," said the witness.

"Well, what happened then?" said the District Attorney somewhat impatiently.

"I asked Mr. Travis again just how it had happened, and he showed me where he had been standing and where my father had been standing, and he repeated what he had already told me."

"Did it seem strange to you that Mr. Travis should have heard a shot fired by someone back of him without turning to see who that person was?"

"May it please the court," said counsel for the defense, "we are not interested in the opinions of this young man."

The voice of the District Attorney kept its same dry, rasping pitch as he continued the examination.

"Did you ask Mr. Travis why he had not turned when he heard the shot?"

The witness nodded.

"What did Mr. Travis say in reply to that question?"

"He said that he was too much concerned about my father to think of anything else. That my father's fall had come so soon after the sound of the shot that, at the time, he was only conscious of the fact that his friend was hurt and that he had run to his aid."

"The counsel for the defense objects to your telling the jury what was in your mind."

"HE probably has his own reasons for this," sneered the District Attorney. "So I will ask you this question: Because of something in your mind did you ask Mr. Travis again why he had not turned at the sound of the shot?"

There was a little pause before the witness answered this question.

"Yes," he said finally.

"I want to be very sure of this," went on the District Attorney. "Because of some thought in your own mind you asked the defendant more than once why he had not turned when he heard a pistol fired from behind his back. That is the case, isn't it?"

"Yes," said the witness.

"How many times did you ask him this question?"

"Three or four," said Sinclair.

"And he made the same reply each time?"

"Yes."

"Was the defendant glib as he reiterated his explanation?"

"I don't think I understand," began the witness.

"I mean, did he say the same thing in the same way each time?"

"No. He said the same thing. He grew a little angry toward the last."

"Then what happened?"

"Captain Leslie came from the Police Department."

"You were present all through the police investigation?"

A nod from the witness.

"You were in the room when Captain Leslie discovered the revolver?"

"Yes."

"Where did he find it?"

"On the floor."

"Whereabouts on the floor? Near the door?"

"No, sir. In the middle of the room."

"You said a little while ago that Mr. Travis showed you where he had been standing. Now, about this pistol. Just where was it lying on the floor? I mean by that, was it between the spot on which Mr. Travis stood and the doorway, or between

where Mr. Travis stood and the desk?"

"It was between where Mr. Travis stood and the desk," said the witness.

TO properly understand the action of the defense counsel at this point, it must be borne in mine that the shrewd old lawyer had two objectives:

(1) To prove that the circumstantial evidence which had enmeshed his client in no way proved Mr. Travis's guilt, and

(2) To impress upon the jury the figure of this young girl alone fighting for her father's life.

The old man was so steeped in criminal law that the People vs. Travis was not the effort of the State to convict a man of murder, but was merely a *case*, almost a mathematical problem. There were certain tricks he could use, certain things he could do, handy weapons all about him. It is very doubtful if at this moment he was capable of feeling any very human emotions. In crises such as this the old man functioned more like a legal machine than a human being.

So when the District Attorney suddenly resumed his seat, and, with a curt nod toward the old man, said quietly, "Your witness," the legal machine began to function, and in its functioning ordained that this benign-looking old gentleman should sit quietly and make no move toward a cross-examination.

Young Sinclair moved uneasily in the witness chair. He realized that by merely telling the truth he had forged an almost unbreakable link in the chain of evidence which was being bound about the father of the girl he loved.

Mary, moved by an overwhelming surge of pity, touched the old man on the arm and whispered to him, "He is suffering terribly. Please don't question him."

The old attorney smiled at her, patted her hand reassuringly, and then rose and walked to a point directly in front of the witness stand, came to a halt and stood for a full minute looking at the young man who sat before him. The District Attorney fumbled his papers nervously, moved two or three law books unnecessarily about the table before him, as his racing mind tried to foretell the line of attack which this fearful old man would take. It came from a most unexpected angle.

"Mr. Sinclair," said the old man very gravely, "I had planned to dismiss you without any questions, but a line of thought has come to me quite suddenly which impels me to ask you about one or two things."

Here he paused and, looking calmly over his shoulder, smiled and nodded at Mary Travis. Without directly making the statement, with that nod and look he conveyed to the jury the thought that here was an old lawyer doing the best he could for his client, but that it had taken the more acute brain of this young girl battling for her father's life to find a line of questioning which would perhaps break down the evidence this young man had given. So sure was the lawyer of his method that he stood and watched the jury's reaction to this thought with a great deal of amusement.

Almost to a man the jury turned toward the girl with looks of sympathetic approval. One juror alone failed to respond. He looked at the ceiling and yawned and then looked at his watch. The wise eyes of the old counselor saw this, and flashed along the optic nerve a signal to the scheming brain behind it, and that signal read "Danger."

"MR. SINCLAIR," said the old man finally, "knowing you as I do, it would be absurd for me to question the

truth of what you have just told me."

He ended this speech with a little bow, which conveyed the impression of a deep and abiding trust in the young man.

"Unfortunately," he continued, "the gentlemen of the jury do not know you as well as I do, so for their benefit I am going to ask you this question: You have told the entire truth about this case, have you not?"

Sinclair nodded.

"I think perhaps the jury would like to hear your voice when you answer that question. You have told all of the truth about this case as you know it?"

"Yes," said the witness calmly.

"In your direct testimony you stated that you had been dancing with Miss Travis when you heard the pistol shot, and that when you heard the shot and raced toward your father's room she had accompanied you?"

"Yes," said the boy.

"Was there anything in your relations which gave Miss Travis the right to do that?"

"Undoubtedly," said the witness; "we were engaged to be married."

A less astute lawyer would have shown surprise at this answer, but this old man merely smiled and became, if anything, more sympathetic in his manner. He was almost deprecating in his next question.

"I want you to believe, sir," said he, "that I am going into this matter with the utmost reluctance. You realize that I sympathize with you most deeply. It is a terrible thing for a young man to be forced to swear away the life of the father of the girl he is going to marry. You say that you are engaged to be married to Miss Travis?" he went on.

"We were engaged," said the boy.

"When was that engagement broken?"

"Shortly after my father's death."

"By whom?"

"Miss Travis."

"What reason did Miss Travis give you for her action?"

"None. She merely sent me back our engagement ring."

"Did you make any effort to find out the cause of this action on her part?"

"I tried to see her, but couldn't."

"You were the principal witness at the Grand Jury investigation of your father's death, were you not?"

The witness nodded.

"Please tell these gentlemen whether you went before the Grand Jury before or after your engagement was broken."

"After it was broken," said the witness.

On the day on which he had ordered Mary to break her engagement with young Sinclair, the old lawyer had planned this question and had foreseen its answer. The moment for which he had built had come. He shrugged his urbanity from him like a smothering garment and became a tense, snarling menace as he leaned toward the boy in the witness chair

"Tell us that again," he shouted. "This young girl broke her engagement with you, the man she loved, the man to whom she had plighted her troth, because she owed all her love and all her allegiance at this time to her father, and after that engagement was broken you went before the Grand Jury with this tale you told in court today. That's the truth, isn't it?"

THEN one of the unforeseen things came into the trial. The boy suddenly realized a way in which he could help the girl he loved. He tossed away from him all thought of self. To gain time in which to organize his plan, he asked the attorney to repeat his question. The old lawyer's voice rose to screaming vi-

tuperation as he did so, and, under cover of that scream, the boy became ready to play his part in the trial. His manner lost its assurance, his glance was no longer unwavering, and he, too, became an actor.

"Why, yes," he finally faltered, "I think it was afterward."

"Don't you know that it was afterward?" shouted the lawyer, pursuing what he thought was a gained advantage.

"Yes, yes," said the boy. "It was afterward. I remember now."

"Suppose you tell these gentlemen how much your action in going before the Grand Jury was influenced by the fact that Miss Travis would no longer see you."

Mary started to rise, but before she could intervene the boy had answered. His simulation of a trapped, bewildered boy was admirable.

"I don't know," he faltered, "how much."

"But it did influence you?"

"I don't know," said the boy; "sometimes it is hard to tell what influences us."

"Will you state that her action had no influence on you?"

"Well," blundered the boy, "I couldn't exactly say that."

He seemed to shrink deeper into his chair as he spoke. His face was apprehensive. His eyes wavered. Into the eyes of the cold lawyer there came the look one sees on the face of a fighter as he stands poised waiting for his fallen opponent to rise before the count of ten. To his mind the man in the witness chair before him was a b e a t e n, frightened youth, hardly worth the attack which the old attorney was about to launch on him, which was exactly the effect young Sinclair had tried to achieve.

"You couldn't say that?" shouted the lawyer. "Well, then, what could you say?"

The witness merely moistened his lips with his tongue and pretended to be unable to speak.

"Oh, come now," shouted the old lawyer, "you were ready enough to talk a minute ago. Speak up now. Out loud. I want the whole courtroom to hear you."

HE paused long enough to tap on his thumb with the point of each of his four fingers. Experience had taught him that the time thus consumed was the measure of the most effective of all pauses.

"How much did the desire for revenge impel you to go before the Grand Jury?"

Before the boy could answer, the District Attorney was on his feet. "I would like to know on what grounds," he began.

The cross-examiner didn't wait for him to finish. He thrust his snarling face over his shoulder and snarled at the District Attorney: "Credibility! Credibility! Credibility!"

Then with a rapid twist back toward the witness he screamed:

"Now, answer that question."

"I don't know," said Sinclair, after a pause. "I am trying to tell you the truth, sir. Honestly, I don't know."

"You don't know?" repeated the lawyer. "Well, we'll soon find out."

Seemingly beaten and crushed, the boy cowered in his chair before the man who was brow-beating him.

He had deceived everyone in the courtroom but the woman who loved him. Mary leaned quickly to her father. "Oh, dad, what shall I do? What shall I do? All this is a lie. He is ruining himself to save you."

"I don't think I need that kind of help," said her father quietly.

Before the cross-examiner could frame his next question Mary was on her feet.

(To Be Continued)

Cooter

By ROARK BRADFORD

COOTER was a wild, fool girl. Everybody wondered what Miss Mary meant when she took her to the Big House from the cabin on the bayou banks when old Crazy Jenny died. It was just like Miss Mary to do something for Cooter, but nobody ever thought she would let her nurse little Norris.

There were a dozen half-grown girls on the plantation—girls who wrapped their hair in neat, decent coils and netted it on top of their heads; who wore shoes and stockings in the winter time; who wore petticoats under their loose calico dresses in the summer; who could even read and write.

But that was the way with white folks. You might know they would pick out that wild Cooter to nurse the five-year old child—Cooter, the daughter of old Crazy Jenny, and probably of big old Blue Steel, who was a blue-gummed black man if ever there was one.

Cooter's hair was never wrapped; she never wore shoes; she wore only such clothes as Crazy Jenny compelled her to wear. She would go to church on Sunday morning and sing louder and shout longer than anybody, and then spend the afternoon singing bawdy songs—on Sunday, mind you.

No wonder they "churched" her when she was fifteen years old.

And foolish Cooter sat through the testimony of Yaller Rucker at the church trial, in dumb, disinterested silence.

"I seed her a-settin' on de bayou bank, naked as a jaybird," Yaller Rucker testified in open church. "Jest a-settin' and singin' a devil-song, on Sunday."

The preacher looked accusingly at Cooter.

"What you got to say, gal?" he demanded.

Cooter stared out the window toward the big live oak tree, where two birds were darting in and out among the tufts of low-hanging Spanish moss.

"What you got to say, gal?" he repeated.

Crazy Jenny arose in the girl's defense.

"Reverun'," she said quietly, "it ain't nothin' de matter wid dat gal, ceptin' she's got year-wigs and can't help it."

"Year-wigs ain't goin' to make you git naked in de cane-brake on Sunday," expostulated the preacher.

"You ain't never had 'em," replied Crazy Jenny. "Year-wigs make you do a heap of things. I had 'em; I know."

She sat down and began rocking her body back and forth, as if in slow palsy—or was it in time with the rhythm of the fetid, steamy air that was coming from the semi-tropical cane-brake and the limpid, mellow water of the bayou?

"Cooter," ordered the preacher, "stand up and answer me. What made you git naked and sing devil-songs on Sunday?"

Cooter neither stood nor answered the question. She looked pleadingly at the old woman at her side, and Crazy Jenny again stood up for her.

"When de bayou is full from sum-

mer rains," she said mysteriously, "when de katy-dids sing bass for de yaller-hammers; when de cotton-mouth moccasins sleep on de shady side of de stumps; when de crows fights back at de jay-birds—it pulls and pulls and pulls——"

"Which pulls?" interrupted the preacher.

"Pulls de young roots off'n de cane," droned Crazy Jenny, "pulls de young leaves off'n de China-berry trees; pulls de young gals——"

"Shut up, crazy woman!" shouted the preacher. "Settin' right here in church, tryin' to drunk me on witch talk. You is plum crazy, and Cooter is just plain mean. Cooter, you git out of dis church, and stay out."

APPARENTLY interested for the first time, Cooter threw back her bushy head and laughed, wildly, almost hysterically. Abruptly she stood up and walked out of the door.

As her big, flat feet buried themselves in the white, hot sand in front of the church, she threw back her head and sang in a high, minor key:

I got me a yaller-skin man.
I got me a black man, too.
If my yaller man, he don't love me,
Well, I guess my black man do.

She sang it out loud, right in front of the church, so everybody could hear her, on Sunday. And she laughed and laughed and went straight toward the cane-brake!

Cooter was wild and foolish. Now, everybody knew it.

Cooter fooled them when Crazy Jenny died and Miss Mary took her to the Big House and made her wash herself and wear clean dresses and wrap up her hair.

Within three months she was an ideal nurse-girl, and no white child in Louisiana was getting better, more attentive, and more devoted care than was little Norris.

While Cooter improved in dress and manners, as she grew up in the household, she did not improve in looks.

As maturity came to her bony, big-jointed frame, her arms grew longer and her forehead grew shorter. A large flat nose nearly covered her rusty black face, and her eyes, as black as night itself, moved sweepingly on jaundiced bearings.

The prim white caps and aprons that Miss Mary made her wear never did look exactly right on her, although they were always neatly starched and ironed.

Yet, Exter, the diminutive house boy, loved her, in his own halting, inarticulate way.

At first he was scared of her, but as she became more methodical about her work in the house, he overcame his fears.

And one sweltering night out under the big oak in the backyard, Exter made his speech.

"Cooter," he said, "I done axed Mister George to ax Miss Mary if it's all right if I and you gits married."

"Baboon face," snorted Cooter, and she giggled.

"Yo' face don't look like no pitcher in de book," retorted the wooer. "Does you talk about faces, I'll put you in de dozens, old Lantern Jaws."

"I ain't studyin' faces," retorted Cooter. "What did Mister George say when you axed him."

"Nothin'."

"Whyn't you ax me?" urged Cooter.

"You'd jest laugh," replied the lover. "You gits tickled at a heap of things when you hadn't ought to git tickled."

COOTER sat silent for a minute, her eyelids drooping as if she were about to fall asleep.

"I ain't always tickled when I laughs," she replied. "Listen, now, Exter—hear dat cane-brake? Hear

de bayou? Hear dat pecker-wood holerin' at night? Sometimes that's what makes me laugh."

Exter strained his ears and sat silent. The hot night air, mingled with alluvial odors from the bayou, the chirping of the insects that played in the grass and underbush at night, soothed him.

He nodded his head lazily, while Cooter gazed stupidly toward the bayou, humming a weird little lullaby that Crazy Jenny used to sing to her.

"It don't make me want to laugh," vouchsafed Exter. "It make me want to go to sleep."

"If Miss Mary say it's all right," Cooter picked up the thread of the wooing, "maybe us gits married when I gits back from N'Awlins."

Exter became wide awake.

"Gits back from which?" he demanded.

"N'Awlins," repeated Cooter. "De baby doctor got to look at de baby and I and Miss Mary and de baby goin' down."

"Sho' nuff!" exclaimed the little negro. Mister George had promised to take him to New Orleans when he went to sell the cotton next fall.

"Yeah," added Cooter, with an air of attempted nonchalance, "goin' to ride in de big car to de station, me settin' on de back seat wid de baby and Miss Mary, jest like when us goes to church. And den, Exter"—and her voice could not conceal her pride—"we rides Numbah Foah!"

"Numbah Foah" was the long black train that came racing out of the big woods late every afternoon, and tore along the track that ran by the lower-field fence, with bells ringing, and whistles blowing, and smoke and steam snorting and hissing, and leaving a big cloud of dust in its wake.

Some of the negroes on the plantation had ridden it. The others dreamed of the day when they would be so lucky.

But when Number Four pulled up to the station for Miss Mary and the baby and Cooter, the charm of riding was lost to Cooter.

"You git on, Miss Mary," counseled the girl, "I and de baby'll walk."

Both Mister George and Miss Mary laughed.

"It wont hurt you, Cooter," Miss Mary promised.

Cooter looked wildly to the right and left, as if for an avenue of escape.

"I hyeard a squinch owl last night," she wailed, "and oh, Lawsy, Miss Mary——"

"Get on that train and cut out the foolishness," commanded Mister George, as the conductor shouted "All aboard."

Cooter thrust her hand in the neck of her dress and quickly withdrew a buck-eye seed that was held by a cotton string.

"Come on, Norris. Us rides Numbah Foah!" she said boldly. "Us ain't worried aboud dis old train."

THE eighty-mile journey to New Orleans was an ordeal.

If Cooter had known how to make her way past the projecting dressing-room at the end of the Pullman, she would have grabbed her charge at the first stop and raced for freedom. But when the train stopped, she was not scared.

It was the clickity-click, clickity-click of the wheels as they bounded from steel rail to steel rail that worried her. She tried to pat her foot to the rhythm of the noise, but the tempo was too fast. It plagued her mind. She wanted to yell.

Then the train slowed up and came to a stop again, and there was Miss Mary, as natural as life, reading the magazine that Mister George bought

for her, and there was little Norris, asking questions, and wanting to play horsie.

Then came a sharp jerk and the clickity-click started again, slow at first; but soon it was going so fast that it made Cooter dizzy.

She tried to think of something to sing to the tune of the wheels, but every song that she knew was too slow. So she sat, wanting to yell, but not daring to, and looked at the green plush on the back of the seat opposite her.

The taxicab ride from the station to the Carelton Hotel was better. It was much worse than riding in the big car at home, but it wasn't as bad as the train.

But the elevator brought her almost to hysterics, and when she was deposited with her mistress on the top floor of the hotel, she was ashen color, and too frightened to speak.

After dinner was served in the rooms, Cooter refused point-blank to go to the servants' quarters on the ground floor unless they let her walk down the stairs.

Miss Mary, sorry for the scared girl, allowed her to make a pallet by the window on the floor of the parlor of the suite. And upon this pallet, Cooter, tired, nervous and excited, sprawled far above the city of New Orleans for her night's rest.

She got little rest that night. The window opened toward Rampart street and the centre of negro activity five blocks away.

Noises, noises, noises, strange and unreal to the black girl, came pouring into the window, and she tossed about the floor restlessly. Then, as the night wore on, the noise quieted somewhat.

Cooter fell into troubled, fretful sleep, only to awaken suddenly with fright.

Finally, weary from her own restlessness, Cooter got up and sat in the window looking out over the city. Street lights away down there appeared like tiny fireflies—"lightnin' bugs," Cooter called them—darting back and forth in the dismal, dank jungle of grotesquely shaped buildings.

And although the room was high above the street it was not so high as to prevent the earthy smell of decaying débris, of greasy foods cooking, and of a thousand-and-one things of which Cooter knew nothing, being borne to her sensitive nostrils.

A fire engine clanged past, almost directly under her, it looked to Cooter. But Cooter was not afraid. She watched it swing across St. Charles street and disappear into cave-like blackness as it went behind a tall building.

She listened to the bell and could hear it bang away for a long time. It sounded like it had separated, for the noise was scattering—or was it other fire engines coming from other fire stations that Cooter did not see?

Quiet came again. Then a street car ground screachingly at the curved rails as it swung into Carondolet street from Canal. Quiet again, and Cooter rested peacefully as she looked out into the night, nodding her head up and down in slow, steady movements.

Suddenly, she held her head rigid and let her mouth drop open to intensify her hearing. She strained her ears, a worried expression coming to her face.

But something that looked like a little square black box on wheels, from where she was sitting, raced down Common street toward the Charity hospital clanging a bell as it went.

When the noise of the ambulance died out, Cooter listened again for the something that she had thought she heard. She began nodding her head

again, worriedly at first, and then more peacefully.

The sound was almost audible. She held her breath.

Tum—ti-ti-tum—ti-ti——

It was a drum beating somewhere away down in that dark, dismal jungle below. Cooter began humming a weird, wordless chant, and the music of the drums came to her more plainly. She shook her bushy head and laughed wildly into the night, leaning as far out the window as she dared.

After minutes, she wiggled back into the room, and started toward the door that opened into the hall.

"N'Awlins folks might be funny," she said to herself. "Cityfied."

Miss Mary had taught her better, anyway, she remembered. So she stepped out of the long white nightgown and walked to the chair upon which she had piled her clothes. She could not hear the drums any more, and the civilization Miss Mary had taught her was asserting itself in her brain.

"Maybe hits a dance," she thought, and laughed softly as she quitted the chair that held her own clothes for the sofa upon which she had so carefully laid out Miss Mary's dress for the next morning.

DOWN on Rampart street they still talk about Black Benny, who hung out at the Mess-Around Café. The Mess-Around was catalogued at police headquarters as a "quiet place," since it kept its rukuses, riots, and razors hidden from the gaze of the passing public by swinging wooden doors.

Music and dancing and raw gin and women were attractions, but it was Black Benny's presence that made the place famous in the New Orleans black underworld.

Black Benny, a powerful, splendidly built negro, had been a prize-fighter, and had served a year at the state prison farm. He had a way with women, and they were all wild about him. Besides this, from his pearl gray derby to his bright yellow shoes he fairly exuded sartorial perfection.

But Black Benny's fame lay in his ability to "beat down" any orchestra that played in the negro dance-halls.

No matter how noisy the trombonist; no matter how loud the cornetist made his instrument shriek, it was never many minutes before the entire orchestra had fallen into a subdued, minor backgrounding for the drums, when Black Benny handled the traps.

There were no fancy, stick-pitch-i'n g, bell-ringing, whistle-blowing tricks in Black Benny's work. He merely sat and beat and beat and beat, in his own idea of tempo, and the rest of the orchestra soon came around. It was slow, hollow, savage.

And Black Benny would sit with his head drooping between his giant shoulders and beat and beat and beat. Then, after the orchestra had caught the swing, he would turn the sticks over to the regular drummer and take the floor with whatever woman it happened to please him to select.

That night Black Benny was in love with Eva Paul, a bright yellow little woman from the local vaudeville house. Eva was contrary. She was good-looking, and she knew it. She could dance and sing and she knew it. And Black Benny loved her and wanted her, and she knew it.

Black Benny was "putting de devil" in the drums, beating out luring jungle calls that were directed at the very soul of the woman. But Eva Paul was seven-eighths white—and a woman. She had been around. So she sipped raw gin alone, and flirted with the stupid negro waiter. And Black Benny beat and beat and beat.

THEN Cooter stepped into the Mess-Around Café. You couldn't fool that foolish Cooter. She might be a country gal, but she knew how to go where she wanted to go.

She had walked down eleven flights of stairs from her mistress' suite, and had made her way through frightful, black, narrow ravines, and around the queerly shaped tall buildings that stood up like huge boulders on either side.

It was more terrifying to her than going through the cane-brakes at night. But she went straight to the drum.

When Cooter walked in no one noticed her. She was dressed in the ill-fitting garments of her mistress. Her black, kinky hair stood out wildly from her bullet-shaped head, that is, except for one huge hank over her left ear, which was caught grotesquely with a strip of pink ribbon which she had appropriated from the wardrobe of little Norris.

Benny hammered away at the drums, and the rest of the orchestra struggled bravely to reel out a "blues" song in time with his slow, steady rhythm.

The little hall was half filled with negroes who sat at tables by the side of a small square arena in the centre set apart for dancing during and between rounds of bootleg gin.

Garlands of smoke from vile cigars hung heavily from the low ceiling, and the odors of raw gin and cheap perfume struggled with the smell of human bodies.

Cooter stood near the door and sniffed the air while the rhythm of the music literally saturated her body so that she rocked back and forth with its time. Then she threw back her head and laughed—a hysterical, crazy laugh mingled with sorrow, it sounded like—and glided, baboon fashion, to the centre of the arena.

Her big, flat feet in coarse shoes hit solidly upon the floor with each step she took, but the noise only accentuated the major beat of the drum, for Cooter's wild soul was responding perfectly to the rhythm.

There was nothing pretty or graceful about her as she stood stiff-legged in the centre of the arena looking stupidly and laughing foolishly at Black Benny, and jerked her ugly body in rigors with the beating drum.

BLACK BENNY looked up, saw the ugly, savage-looking creature before him, and grinned, as he began "puttin' on de doubles" in his hammering.

Cooter laughed loudly again and began singing in a high, minor key in the slow time of the music:

> It ain't no fun in lovin'
> Another woman's man.
> She gits him when she wants him;
> You got to take him when you can.

Benny nodded to the regular drummer, who slid into the chair and continued the beating without losing the time. Then he looked roguishly at Eva and strutted devilishly toward Cooter.

They danced around the floor together, stepping and whirling wildly, separating and falling back together in the most aphroditic fashion. Black Benny, catlike in movement, ducked in and out and around while Cooter flopped and reeled awkwardly.

Cooter looked like a giant gorilla moving through a dense jungle, never stumbling and never falling, but always putting her feet down in the most unexpected places; and snapping her knees back, one after the other, in a way that started a rolling, billowy motion that progressed through her hips and body.

She finally threw her head back with a sharp jerk, just as the drum beat again.

Black Benny's shadow at the drum was doing his best.

The musicians, long since winded, had laid their instruments across their laps and, with the rest of the negroes in the hall, were watching, mouths opened stupidly, and heads bobbing time to the drums.

Black Benny whirled Cooter through an impossible gyration of twists and spins that left her standing flat-footed, five feet to the front of him. Then he began a step that he himself had invented.

"Inchin' Up," it is called in the Rampart street honky-tonks. And Cooter stood facing him, both feet flat on the floor, with her knees bending and snapping in slow jerks.

And Black Benny was coming to her. Knees bending low, and one leg after the other waving in slow, wide, harmonious circles, he made his way slowly, an inch at a time, by shoving his hips forward so sharply, as each circle was completed, that his feet were caused to slide forward on the floor.

But raw gin, the intermingling odors of smoke and cheap perfume, and the "devil in the drums" was too much for that other one-eighth of Eva Paul's blood.

She watched the two dancers as long as she could stand it, and then, with an animal-like shriek, she snatched tearingly at her flimsy clothing and leaped to the side of ugly Cooter.

Standing nimbly on her toes, with feet spread wide apart and her arms limber from the elbows down and weaving with the motions of her body, Eva Paul began crying a whining chant to Black Benny; a whine that echoed the awful savagery of the drums. "Sally Long" they call the dance on Rampart street.

She caught Black Benny's eye for just a brief moment. She did not understand the strange, wild, ferocious glint in it, nor did she know why his huge mouth was hanging open, with the saliva mixing with the perspiration that rolled down his shiny, black face.

But she knew that Black Benny was moving toward that ugly, stiff, grunting, jerking woman by her side instead of toward her.

Like an enraged panther, Eva Paul leaped at Cooter and buried her fingers into the black flesh. The drums stopped, and an ominous hush fell over the hall.

Then Black Benny's ham-like hand swished through the air, and Eva Paul was slapped sprawling under a table at the side of the arena; and Black Benny took Cooter in his arms and started to walk off with her.

Suddenly there came a wild, marrow-chilling scream from Eva; the flash of a long knife that someone had slipped into her hands, and an instant later, Black Benny lay sprawled on the floor with blood gushing from a gash in his heart. Eva, inarticulate, was holding the bloody knife, and looking wildly for Cooter. But Cooter was gone.

The same thing that, at other times, had warned Cooter not to step over a fallen tree and on the back of the rattlesnake that lay coiled there, sent her racing through the swinging doors and into the street when Eva screamed.

THE next morning, when Cooter did not answer Miss Mary's call from the bedroom, the mistress was worried lest something had happened. She went into the parlor. But there on the floor lay Cooter, clad in the long white nightgown, sleeping soundly.

"Poor, scared, tired thing," said Miss Mary.

And Cooter was tired and scared. The early morning traffic had started

before she found her way back to the hotel, and she had walked up the eleven flights of stairs.

And it was not until she was back in the Big House, two days later, that her nervous tension relaxed.

When the suitcases were unpacked and little Norris was fed her stewed fruit and bread and milk and tucked into bed, Cooter went out to the spring house to cool.

She sat on the steps and slipped out of her shoes and stockings and let her feet rest on the cool, damp ground.

Presently, Aunt Lizzie-bet came out for a bucket of water.

"What you doin', sittin' here bar'-footed?" she demanded. "S'pose de baby'd wake up and start to cry. What'd you look like walkin' in de house bar'-footed? Don't you know Miss Mary say you got to wear shoes? Gal, you ain't got a lick er sense. Somebody'd see you and think you ain't got no white fo'ks. Put on dem shoes, gal."

"My footses hurts," said Cooter defiantly. "It's goin' to rain."

And she sat glumly on while the old woman drew the water and went mumbling back to the kitchen.

After a while Exter came out and joined her.

"Aunt Lizzie-bet said you was here waitin' for me."

Cooter remained silent and continued her stupid gaze into the fast gathering darkness. Exter stared dumbly from her to the cane-brake and bayou, the direction of her gaze.

He expected a better reception. But then "You got to handle dis fool woman," he said to himself, his male ego surging to the fore.

"Tell me somethin' about N'Awlins, gal," he said gruffly, sitting down beside her.

"Ain't nothin' to tell," replied Cooter.

The runty little Exter was puzzled. After a minute he changed his tactics.

"Mister George said I and you could git married," he offered. "Ain't you glad, sweenenin'?" Exter slipped his arm around Cooter's waist and squeezed.

But Cooter paid no attention.

"Wid a pair of cou't house licenses," insisted Exter.

A drop of rain hit Cooter's face. Then another and another. She raised her head and sniffed.

Almost as if by signals, the crickets became quiet down in the cane-brake, and the bullfrogs took up the song. Exter held her closer.

"Hear dat, Exter?" demanded Cooter.

"Hear which, Sugar Foots?"

"Nothin', Baboon Face."

"I hears yo' old heart a-beatin'—goin' bum-de-de—bum-de-de—bum—jest like a drum."

"Dat ain't my heart, Exter," said Cooter mysteriously. "Listen—hear it?" and she laughed wildly and stood up.

The rain was now falling in a heavy, muggy drizzle.

Exter stood up and started toward her, and Cooter backed off, laughing hysterically.

"Hear it, Exter? Listen," she kept repeating, slipping out of her apron and dress as she retreated before the advancing little Exter.

"Dere it goes again, Exter—bum-di-di—bum-di-di-bum."

She reached the gate that opened toward the cane-brake.

"Bum-di-di—bum-di-di-bum."

"Wait, Cooter," pleaded Exter, as the last vestige of civilization fell away from the girl.

But Cooter laughed in wild free laugh and raced toward the jungle of the cane-brake.

Jessie And Essie

By HAROLD de POLO

"NOW lookit here, Essie—lookit here! Jest because you come to have a name one letter short o' your sister Jessie's, savvy, ain't no reason nohow for you to git so sassy. Sassy? Great Gilas, gal, you're becomin' right cantankerous — plain, plumb an' unadorned cantankerous!"

Plutarch Bogardus, as he uttered his complaint, took the can-opener from the tin of condensed milk. Stiffening his calloused index fingers, he sharply struck the rattlesnake that lay coiled up to the right of him on the side of the head.

"Absolutely, Essie," he went on, as the chastised reptile sheepishly hung her head, "you're comin' to make me downright ashamed o' you. I told you nigh onto a thousan' times never to do no rattlin' less'n I bid you do it, ain't I? You got no manners, Essie!"

He paused and cleared his throat, rubbing the straggly goatee on his otherwise clean-shaven face:

"Lookit your sister, there—lookit Jessie! Does *she* come to act like a little baby a-cryin' for her bottle before it's fixed? No, *ma'am*, she don't. I jest got to speak once to her, an' no more!"

With his left hand, as he was reprimanding Essie, he gently stroked the back of the other snake. Motionless, Jessie accepted the petting, only the slow blinking of her eyes signifying her pleasure.

"Yes, *ma'am*, Essie gal," the old man continued sternly, "it appears to me you don't appreciate your name, the way you act lately. An' could *I* help you was called such? I could *not!* Don't you remember how I was comin' out o' Jim Keno's place down to Sapulpa, after sittin' in a stud game?

"After havin' them two queens back to back, Bessie an' Tessie, I lost my last stack by havin' Lon Holcombe be dealed a third jack on the fifth card.

"An' don't you remember, as I was walkin' home an' a-wishin' how I'd had even one o' them black ladies, either Essie or Jessie, I run acrost you two mites o' motherless babes, helpless there on the road. Why, what *could* I of christened you but them two names I was thinkin'—Jessie an' Essie?"

Again, with his right forefinger, he touched the latter pet, gently rebuking:

"Great Gilas, Essie gal, *you* ain't the only one. Lookit *me*, called Plutarch, that my mammy an' pappy wished onto me! Do *I* like it? I do *not!* But did I sass my mammy an' pappy? No, *ma'am!*"

Plutarch Bogardus stopped once more, and his aspect became extremely formidable:

"Essie," he said, very distinctly, "I'll begin to think I *am* comin' to be queer, like some o' these sens'ble people down to Sapulpa say. Yep, I'll begin to think I *am* nursin' one viper, leastways, to my bosom.

"Here I been drawin' twenty dollars a month as watchman, these las' two months, an' a-payin' twenty-eight cents a can for this condensed milk—an' all I ask is obedience. I want obedience t'-day, too, Essie,

more'n I ever have in the two years I been takin' care o' you gals. That's why I'm a-talkin' so!"

WITH a vigorous nod of his head, a further angry glare, he finished. Then, once more, he returned to his task of opening the can. This accomplished, he put two heaping spoonfuls of their favorite delicacy into a saucer and painstakingly mixed it with water to the consistency they liked.

Whimsically, affectionately, he watched them greedily partake of it, to the last drop, after he had given his permission. Then, his eyes once more twinkling, he stretched out an arm to each:

"Jessie! Essie!"

Swiftly, unerringly, the pair of snakes ran up his arms at the words, coiling themselves dexterously on his shoulders. With his pets thus poised, he walked over to the doorway of his little shack. On each side of it there was a small shelf, perhaps five feet from the floor, and in the direction of these he once more put his arms:

"Jessie! Essie!"

With the speed and grace and precision that was a compliment to the man who had trained them, the reptiles uncoiled, traveled across his sleeves and settled back to the table and secured the remnants of what he had saved from his own meal—two fat, luscious, oily sardines.

He held up the fish, for a full minute, before the eyes of his pets, and although this particular product was the food they most craved, neither made a move. Like two petrified things they stayed. Smiling, Plutarch then moved closer:

"Jessie! Essie!"

At his command, which was all in the intonation of the words, those two heads moved, those jaws opened, and the longed-for morsels disappeared. Instantly, too, the pets again became as quiet and as rigid as before, and Plutarch Bogardus laughed happily as he shook a bony finger:

"*That* comes to be the way I like to see you behave, young gals," he chuckled admiringly, "an' that's what makes me so tarnation proud o' you! An' I need to be proud o' you t'-day, looking for your help the way I am, like I already said before this!"

OLD Plutarch sat down on the sill of his open doorway. He was careful to put his left shoulder furthest forward, the one which of recent months had been troubled with twinges of rheumatism, so that the sun would hit it full. It was a sun, too, calculated to give a man all the action he demanded.

Bogardus, however, was apparently satisfied. As he fished out an old pipe, and stuffed it with burnable material, he smiled; as he got it going and puffed luxuriously, he heaved a heavy sigh of contentment; and, before long, he was out and out chuckling aloud:

"I reckon," he said, and slapped his thigh, "I jest reckon!"

The sun, to be perfectly fair, was not the cause of this more or less joyous speech; it was, in fact, due to two small moving dots down there a mile below him, that had crossed the plain from Sapulpa and were beginning the long, crazily tortuous ascent that would eventually lead them to his shack.

"Come on, you Corson brothers," he laughed, with a certain grim glee, "I an' Jessie an' Essie is a-waitin'—a-waitin'!"

For a time, after that, Plutarch did nothing but sit there and smoke his pipe and keep on smiling to himself—and keep his eyes glued on the pair of horsemen who were slowly, tediously, making their way up the winding trail.

They could be heard below him, at

last, topping the final rise. They were swearing beautifully, fervidly, thoroughly. In substance, they were simply remarking that it was a passably warm day and a slightly annoying climb. Soon they came into view:

"Been expectin' you, gentlemen," greeted Plutarch, politely rising.

A scowl and a grunt, respectively, were the answers as they dismounted.

"Right warm day an' a right stiff climb," went on the old man pleasantly.

"You the watchman we hired?" snapped out one.

Plutarch Bogardus regarded them agreeably, speculatively. It was the first time he had seen the famed Corson brothers, rated as the shrewdest, hardest, mining men in the West. He told himself that they looked it—the hard part.

Stockily built, each in their latter forties, their aggressive faces, with the steely-gray and somewhat close-set eyes, made them seem capable of the stories he had heard, and one of which he specifically knew about.

"Yes, gentlemen," he said, with a wave of his arm at the yawning shaft to his right, "I come to be the watchman o' the Blue Strike Mine, hired by your agent to Sapulpa when you people bought her!"

"Better get started, Nat," said the elder Corson to his brother.

"Right, Clint!"

"Wont you gentlemen try a drink o' cool water after that ride through the sun?" offered Plutarch courteously.

"Think we might," accepted Clint.

"Step right in, gentlemen!"

Old Bogardus, standing in the doorway, bowed them inside. Once there, he deliberately closed the door after them. He put his back against it and sighed and puffed smoke, and just gazed silently at the brothers with his bright blue eyes twinkling their merriest and their mightiest.

"Damn it," barked the older mining man, "where's the water? We're in a hurry!"

"Yes, gentlemen," beamed Plutarch, "I been expectin' you for a long, long time. A tarnation long time, you might put it."

"The old fool's crazy, Clint," concluded the younger Corson. Then he added, as he stepped threateningly forward: "Come to your senses and get that water or——"

"Jessie! Essie!"

PLUTARCH had spoken quickly, with a decided note of hostility in his tone. And on either side of him, from those shelves, there came an ominous, inimitable rattle from those pets that so well understood every minute inflection of his voice.

Nat Corson jumped back, his lower jaw sagging, his eyes going round. Even Clint, the reputedly more hard-boiled customer, followed his brother's example:

"What the devil!" he got out, and glared savagely.

"Jest Jessie an' Essie, gentlemen, that's all," explained Plutarch mildly. "Yep, I an' them sure has been expectin' you!"

Graciously, he pointed to either side of him, at about the heighth of his shoulders, to the pair of snakes that were coiled there with upraised heads and venomously staring orbs and angrily opened jaws.

"My little she pards, gentlemen," he went on, "an' it comes to me to warn you, if you happen to be totin' a gun—which same I aim to think you're not—that it 'ud be right poor policy to draw. Them cute darlin's can sure strike mighty quick!"

"If I *had* a gun, you damned old fool," roared Nat Corson, "I'd blow your crazy head off!"

"Easy, Nat."

The older Corson, the calmer, had breathed out the words from a cor-

ner of his suddenly tautened lips, but they were nevertheless distinct to Plutarch.

"Come to reckon that's plumb sensible advice you're givin', Mister Clint," he said.

"What's the big idea, old-timer?"

Clint Corson put his question casually, cordially, with a smile that was intended to be friendly, almost comradely. It was. Even so, that glance that he tried to surreptitiously cast at the pair of reptiles was not. It was, baldly, a trifle uneasy.

"Oh, shucks," laughed the old watchman, "you ain't got no call to feel worried, Mister Clint. Less'n, o' course—less'n I takes away my restrainin' influence," he finished gravely.

"Pretty well trained, eh?" smiled the mining man, as if wishing to get on confidential terms.

"Trained? Great Gilas, Mister Clint, I got them two gals so plumb obedient I could—yessir, I could send 'em over to rest on your shoulders, I'm a-bettin', an' they wouldn't dast hurt you a might, less'n, like I said, I told 'em to. Jest for the fun, let me do some demonstra——"

"Thanks," cut in Corson, unconsciously hunching his shoulders under his coat. "Take your word for it."

"Well, if you say so," returned Plutarch glumly.

"But by the way, old-timer," Clint came back to the charge, "what's all this mean? Let a fellow in on it!"

"Funny, ain't it," grinned Bogardus, "how jest a little bit o' rattlin' kind o' gets a *hombre* to hurryin', huh? But set down—set down an' be comfortable. Me? Lord, I come to like to be homey, an' sociable, an' not go at these here talks too rapid. Set down, set down, gentlemen!"

A swift glance passed between the two brothers. It said, all in a flash of a second, that they were firmly convinced they had to do with a madman—and that they had, in consequence, most assuredly better watch their step.

"Certainly," answered the younger, speaking for the first time, "always did prefer sitting, myself!"

"If you don't mind," apologized Plutarch, "jest take them two chairs an' set next to each other, on the other side o' the table. Like to be able to enjoy lookin' at you both at the same time, without no neck-cranin' or sech things."

As the brothers pulled up the chairs and did as they were told, Bogardus spoke again, softly, caressingly:

"Jessie! Essie!"

LITERALLY pop-eyed, and white under their tan, Nat and Clint Corson watched the pair of rattlers, as the old man put out his arms, glide smoothly along them and come to rest, in nicely balanced coils, on his shoulders.

"My God," breathed Nat, his words coming without his knowing it, "they *are* well trained!"

"Perfec'—jest perfec'," replied Plutarch, smilingly and gratefully.

He moved from his place by the door then, his pets still with him, and picked up another chair. As he dragged it across the room and started to bring it up to the table, however, the younger Corson edged back.

"Hold on, dammit," he said, "they may be nice little friends of yours, as you say, but leave 'em up there on those shelves."

"Sort of—sort of prefer looking at them from a distance, old-timer. Lends enchantment, as the phrase has it."

It was the cooler and older Corson who got this out, and he even managed a laugh. Nevertheless, he had the palest aspect around the gills and

his legs had stiffened so as to be ready for a sudden leap.

"Somehow — somehow," drawled Plutarch, "I jest don't feel comfortable without these here gals. That is, gentlemen, when I feel like talkin' about certain things."

"Easy, Nat!"

It was Clint, again, sliding the words out of the corner of his mouth as the younger man pushed away. He, himself, sat there like a graven image.

He was still ready to jump, but his face had set hard. His eyes had focused unwaveringly on those of the old man, and, when he spoke, he bit out his speech crisply, concisely, as was his custom when facing any big business situation.

"Lay your cards on the table, old-timer. I'm listening!"

Bogardus, lazily, scratched first Jessie, and then Essie, on the back of the head.

"Jest keep eyein' the gentlemen, ladies, an' also keep open them ears for my orders."

Then, once more filling his pipe, he lit it. Puffing contentedly, he let out his words with his cloud of smoke.

"My cards, gentlemen," he said, "come to date back to close to nine years ago, over in the Pachuca district, back in Nevada. Come to remember it?"

A frown creased the brows of the Corson brothers as they exchanged a glance. Then the younger nodded.

"Swung that *Tres Gatos* proposition, about that time!"

"That's so," agreed the older, and once more squarely faced Plutarch.

"That sure was the name—*Tres Gatos*," remarked Bogardus, playing with his scrawny goatee. "Yessir, an' you two gentlemen, likewise, sure swung it."

As he spoke, the face of Clint Corson lightened, then hardened more than ever. A certain relief, though, had come to it; the relief that was apt to be his when he had decided that he was not, after all, dealing with an insane specimen.

He became, immediately, strictly business. More, he shrewdly hit the nail on the head.

"Pinched you back there, eh? Well, how? And what's your complaint and what's the antidote you propose?"

Plutarch chuckled, and there was sincere admiration in his voice.

"Mister Clint, I aim to state they tell the truth. You do move prompt-like an' talk turkey when you have to, huh? Well," he added, more slowly, and with his eyes twinkling, "I reckon we can get together pretty quick, that bein' so."

He paused at this, and once more stroked his pets, this time under the jaws. As he finished, too, he actually took each one by the head and tweaked it.

NAT, without making any bones, leaned further away in his chair, Clint, though remaining rigid, could not hide the slight shudder of what must have been revulsion from crossing his face.

"Yessir," repeated the old man, again facing his company, "I reckon we *can* get together *mighty* quick."

"Shoot!"

Clint Corson snapped out the words tersely, his eyes riveted on the pair of rattlers.

"Well," mused Plutarch Bogardus, lazily stretching himself and affectionately tickling the coiled bodies of his pets, "it comes to me, it does, that that there *Tres Gatos* affair was maybe, like they say, kind o' small potatoes to you gentlemen o' big business.

"I reckon I'm sure o' that, even, for you two didn't come to attend to it yourselves, but had this here—

what was his name?—yes, this here Burt Newman look after it.

"You jest wanted all the property on the north o' the bigger vein, an' you passed out the orders it was to be got. When you two Corson boys says them words, too, I know it means to let nothin' stand in the way. That's big business, huh?"

The old watchman stopped and laughed. At the same time, he reached up and drew down the head of Jessie, so that it hung, poised over his chest, swaying menacingly at the men across the table.

It was too much, even, for the iron nerves of Clint. Suddenly, with a spasmotic jerk, he sprang back, and his voice was decidedly off key as he shouted:

"Put that damn thing back, you old fool, and talk reason!"

"Are you trying to commit *murder?*" bellowed Nat.

Plutarch caressed his pet, in reply, and then put her back in her coiled position.

"Murder? Harsh word, gentlemen," he rebuked gravely. "Come to me I can't help it, if you two offends an' attacks my pets?

"No, sir, I'm right strong in affirmin' that did anyone happen along an' find your bodies here they sure *wouldn't* call it murder. Accidental death by reptile poisoning, *I'm* a-bettin' a coroner would put it. Think so, gentlemen?"

Clint's face now was mottled. There was wild rage in his eyes, but it was an impotent rage behind which the barest trace of plain fear lurked.

"Spill your story," he breathed thickly.

"Still a-hurried; still a-wantin' your own way like always, eh? Oh, well—habit, habit!"

Bogardus, on this occasion, took down the head of Essie and let it dangle suggestively for a moment or so. Putting it back in place, he spoke slowly:

"I'll oblige, gentlemen. You got all the land north o' the *Tres Gatos;* got it by payin' for it, way below value. You jest had this Burt Newman go an' offer your price, an' if it wasn't accepted you proved where you could freeze out the little fellers an' see that in the end they got still less.

"Well, I was the one that didn't buckle into you. I had a mite of a shaft sunk, there, on that northwest triangle piece a-juttin' onto the *Tres Gatos.* Wasn't so much—didn't turn out to be much later, even, I admit—but it was all I owned in the world, gentlemen.

"You see, I'd sunk every dollar I had in the almighty universe into that there shaft—a mean matter o' a couple o' thousand. I reckon you two calls that cigar money, but it was a big stake to me.

"Also, gentlemen, with the two thousand more I'd borrowed from the bank, to put into some picayune machinery, I was jest ready to make my start. Yessir, I told that to Burt Newman, an' I likewise told him to go to hell when he threatened me!"

The old gold hunter stopped. He l a u g h e d — laughed immoderately, laughed as if it were a huge joke with himself as the admitted butt.

"But I was younger, then, gentlemen," he went on, "younger an' sort o' un—unsophisticated. Can't blame me much. I'd never gone up against these here big business methods before, an' I was fool enough to think a little feller could fight 'em. I reckon you know the answer, even though you don't remember my insignif'cant case.

"I was hampered every way, such as the dirty work that went on one night o' fillin' in my shaft when I was away gettin' some supplies. By the time I'd righted that—for I didn't

have no hand to help me an' had to do it alone—my note was due at the bank. They wouldn't carry me, nor extend it, though they'd always been blamed decent to us small fellers before.

"Still, I reckon they had to buckle under to the bigger men theirselves, for they was small fry compared to other banks I hear you gentlemen control. Yessir, they jest plain closed down on me, they did, an' left me stranded with my two thousand gone!"

AGAIN he laughed, this time even more heartily. The joke on himself, indeed, seemed to be a side-splitting one.

Clint Corson, jerkily, nodded to his brother, and a look passed between them.

"What do you want? That two thousand?"

"I don't!"

Blandly, and with a drawl, Plutarch Bogardus answered the terse, crisp question. He took his snakes by the necks now and tenderly pulled them down onto the table.

It was one too much for the Corsons. Panic-stricken, these two men of millions, these two men who boasted of having outwitted the sharpest competitors in the country, ignominiously stumbled from their chairs and fled to the furthest wall of the dilapidated shack.

"Damn you—damn you!" cried Nat gaspingly.

"You fool madman," roared Clint, "do you want to be up for *murder?*"

"Only thing *I* want, gentlemen," retorted Bogardus mildly, as he lovingly tickled his pets, "is jest five thousand cash in American currency!"

"You pig-headed crook," snapped Clint, "do you know that you can be arrested for blackmail?"

"Blackmail? Harsh words again, gentlemen," warned the old man thoughtfully. "Why, gentlemen, I don't see nothing here could be con—construed to mean that. Lord, no. You two, a-comin' here an' listening to my story, havin' been so touched by the injustice o' your past actions, which same was unknowed to you an' carried out by a hirelin', has decided to make amends.

"Great Gilas, gentlemen, it's so clear to you, an' your consciences is so tore up, that you even go to the trouble o' givin' me, as well as the five thousand, a paper signed by you both that tell about it. Blackmail? Lord, no, Mister Clint an' Mister Nat, don't get *that* idea!"

"It's blackmail, plain and simple," barked out Nat. "If you knew a little law you'd realize that it's a serious offense and that we can prove—"

But his brother stopped him with a short toss of his head, and faced their opponent.

"Why five thousand when you lost only two?" he asked, making it seem as if he were willing to discuss terms.

"B e c a u s e," said Plutarch, "it comes to be nine years ago, an' the money has been out all that while; on top o' that, I come to learn you took jest about that amount from my little vein. O' course, I couldn't have done it myself, I'm confessin', with what machinery I had there. Still, it only seems reasonable.

"Added to all that, gentlemen, is the fact that I got a hankerin' to traipse along to Floridy. These bitin' nights, up in the mountains, ain't jest what you might term salubrious for my rheumatiz. I got a pard, over in this Floridy, with a small orange grove that I can buy in a half-interest for four thousand.

"With the balance, I conclude to travel right royal for once in my life an' have a few hundred left over for pocket money. There, gentlemen, I

laid all my cards on the table, like you asked me to before!"

As he paused, and commenced to fondle his pets, Clint Corson seemed to deliberate. For a long, long minute, he stood with folded arms, nursing his aggressive jaw with one upraised hand. Finally, with a cough, he turned to his brother:

"Guess he's got us, Nat," he admitted ruefully.

WITH the words, from his inside pocket he drew forth a checkbook and a fountain-pen. Rapidly, he scribbled, and then, tearing out the oblong slip of paper, he held it toward the old watchman.

"There you are, old-timer," he said, with a laugh that was supposed to come grudgingly. "You had us cornered!"

"Put it on the table," ordered Plutarch. "I'll hold the gals whilst you do!"

Lightly, Clint Corson stepped forward, stretched out his arms as far as it would reach, and, dropping the check, leaped nimbly backward.

Plutarch let it lay there. He refilled his pipe and lit a match. Then he took the check, held it over the flame, and ignited his tobacco from the burning piece of paper. When the smoke was coming freely, thickly, he arose. He cleared a huge cloud of it, and then he spoke:

"Jessie! Essie!"

Instantly, in perfect accord, the two pets rattled—rattled long and ominously.

Plutarch Bogardus then faced his adversaries. There was still a bright twinkle in his likable eyes; but in the set of his lean jaw, in the line of his determined lips, there was an expression that, perforce, commanded respect and attention. This same quality, too, was in his voice.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I jest showed you, once more, how I got them two gals trained; I ought to have, seein' as how I been playin' with 'em an' carin' for 'em for the last two year.

"Two months ago, gentlemen, I gave up a job down to Sapulpa, below there, that was a-nettin' me three-fifty a day—an' I gave it up to take this here one at twenty a month. Know why, gentlemen? Because I knowed, from true gossip, that you two always come alone to look over a mine you buy before startin' things goin'.

"Also, gentlemen, they all tell me that you two got the habit o' carryin' a mighty sum o' cash along, so's to have enough for any deal you may happen onto, the idea bein', an' I admit it's a true one, that the sight o' currency does a heap more than a wrote-out check. An' this case ain't no exception, neither!"

The veteran gold hunter paused and puffed, and his voice became slightly metallic.

"Gentlemen," he continued, "I might have been a hog, which I ain't. I'm simply askin' for what's honestly—yes, honestly—due me. I'm only takin' big business methods, in maybe what you'd call crude form, to go an' accomplish my deal.

"Gentlemen, I'm plain pleadin' with you, man to man, not to go an' make me resort to have to do any *strikin'*. That is, gentlemen, through these here little gals o' mine!"

"It's an outrage," started Nat. "It's——"

Once more, though, the older brother stilled him. Clint Corson had not gained his reputation for nothing, nor his present powerful position in the world of Western finance.

One of his chief attributes, he prided himself, was that he knew men; and in the face of the old prospector, now, he was sure that he read relentless and even desperate pur-

pose. He, himself, was probably beaten now, but later . . .

Abruptly, as he made his decision, he turned on his brother with a shrug of resignation.

"We're licked, Nat," he admitted. "Yank five thousand out of the old money belt."

"I tell you it's blackmail; I tell you——"

"No use, Nat," cut in Clint, in somewhat sharp tones. "Toss it across."

"An' while he's gettin' it out," supplemented Plutarch, "you might draw up jest a line or two. Oh, you know, sort o' sayin' that the money is in—oh, in payment for a back claim o' the Bogardus Mine, over to *Tres Gatos*. Better get it right first off, without no trick words, cause you'll only have to be bothered writin' it out till you do!"

In a minute or two more, five crisp, clean, thousand dollar bills were tossed on the table; following them, in another instant, there came a slip of paper. Plutarch, first, picked up the latter and read it:

> We, the undersigned, hereby make payment, in the sum of five thousand dollars cash, to one Plutarch Bogardus. This is in full payment for the Bogardus Mine, adjoining our own property, in Nevada, known as the *Tres Gatos* Mine.
>
> CLINTON CORSON,
> NATHANIEL CORSON.

NODDING contentedly, Plutarch stuffed this into the breast pocket of his frayed flannel shirt; after it, he tucked the five crinkly bills and methodically buttoned down the flap.

"Gentlemen," he told them, "I sure thank you. I'm a-leavin' you, now, to go ahead an' examine this here mine—an' I'm honestly wishin' you all the luck in the world with it.

"As I'm traipsin' to Sapulpa, an' sort o' don't hanker to maybe be followed, I'm takin' your cayuses with me. Still, gentlemen, the walk for you wont be so bad, at that—downward. Leastways, I reckon it'll be cooler when you start toward evenin'."

There was no answer from the Corson brothers this time—verbally. But the proverbial look that kills was wholly, indisputably theirs. A pretty picture, they made, of a pair of baffled, big-time capitalists.

Plutarch, crooning softly, unintelligibly, was stroking his pets. At last, reaching out his arms, he spoke to them:

"Jessie! Essie!"

As obediently, as flawlessly as always, they negotiated that journey across his sleeves and perched, perfectly balanced, on his shoulders.

"Damned if he hasn't got 'em hypnotized," muttered Nat.

Clint, however, only drew in his breath with a whistle and grimly nodded his head.

Backing cautiously to the door, Bogardus could not refrain from chuckling out what was nothing but a cryptic speech to the two brothers.

"Gals," he said, "blamed if you ain't the two most payin' brace o' queens I ever held; yes, *ma'ams*, you sure do make up for what I lost on them two red ones that night jest a mite before I found you!"

With that, and the chuckle still on his lips, he opened the door, backed carefully out, and closed it. He also locked it.

BUT the Corson brothers were not going to give up without one last fling. As Plutarch mounted one of their horses, and started off down the trail with the other ahead of him, the two trapped financiers pushed open the single tiny window on one side of the dilapidated shack.

"We're giving you one last chance," snarled Nat. "Hand back that money now, you old madman, and we'll promise not to prosecute.

Otherwise, we'll follow you down to Sapulpa, when you get those hanged rattlers away, and have you arrested immediately. I'm telling you that you'd better——"

"He's telling the truth, Bogardus," cut in Clint calmly, even gravely. "I give you my word of honor that you're facing a serious charge, and a charge that we can pretty well prove. I'll also give you my word of honor that if you return the money and depart with those charming pets, we will not enter any complaint."

Plutarch Bogardus turned. As he faced them, his hands quite instinctively fondled the heads of Essie and Jessie. A smile covered his old, leathery, weather-beaten face, and the twinkle in his bright blue eyes, so young for their years, was like that of a mischievous young boy.

"Gentlemen," he drawled out, lazily, quizzically, "I come to admit, I do, that you two is maybe tellin' the truth. It's a right serious charge, an' maybe you *could* prove it.

"But, gentlemen, there likewise comes to be one reason why you don't do no prosecutin'. There jest comes to be one weapon I'm a-holdin'—an' it's a weapon that gets more powerful, you might put it, accordin' to the importance o' the man it's used against. Gentlemen, that there weapon comes to be *ridicule!*"

"Ridicule?" bellowed Nat. "Why, you crazy old——"

But Clint, the cooler, again interrupted. He smiled and shook his head in disagreement.

"Bogardus," he said, "I don't think there's much ridicule in a couple of unarmed men surrendering to another man who holds two poisonous rattlers over them. You'd find, I think, that even a fellow who'd face gunfire would buckle under to that. No, Bogardus, I think you'd better——"

"I'm agreein' with most o' what you say, Mister Clint," stated Plutarch quite blandly.

"Eh? What? Then——"

"Point is, though," continued the old-timer, with that amused chuckle, "that you'd be laughed plumb out o' Sapulpa—an' prob'ly likewise out o' them tony an' high-falutin' clubs you belongs to down to Denver an' Frisco an' Lord knows where else—once it became known you was bluffed by an empty gun!"

He paused, turned, and started down the trail. He pivoted and faced them again when only his head was visible.

"Why, gentlemen," he sang back, "Jessie an' Essie is the most harmless an' lovin'est critters a-livin', for didn't I take out their pizen bags that very first night I found 'em?"

Behind him, as he ambled resolutely down the trail, Plutarch heard language that far outstripped the efforts of the Corson pair on their upward journey.

Bringing Home The Bacon

By EVERETT SHINN

A TWO PART STORY—PART II

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

IRVING LIPPET, son of Asa Lippet of Warsaw, decides he cannot make sufficient progress in the home town and therefore leaves for New York to show the home folks that he can "bring home the bacon."

When Irving reaches New York he meets Roy Reamer, who immediately invites him to Honey House, a cabaret, where Irving meets Babe Boots. His thoughts from this moment become so engaged with Babe Boots and Honey House, that employment and "bringing home the bacon" are merely of secondary consequence during the months that follow.

One evening when Irving is preparing for his nightly visit to Honey House, he hears someone fumbling along the hall with a door-key and he goes out to assist. In this way he meets Mary Bates, in whom he confides all his enthusiasms, principally with respect to Babe Boots, Honey House, and the rather mysterious young woman who leads the orchestra at the dance hall. In Irving's opinion this "mysterious woman" is a great orchestra leader; but as a woman she is "a fried egg." It is only quite casually that he mentions his consuming desire to "show" the home folks.

One evening he comes in excitedly to tell Mary Bates of his good fortune with the ponies, and of his immediate plans to take Babe Boots to Warsaw in style. Babe, he is quite sure, will knock Warsaw dead, and will thus demonstrate how a Lippet "brings home the bacon." Mary Bates, oddly enough, receives the news by fainting.

However, Irving goes back to Warsaw with Babe.

CHAPTER IX.

"KNOCKING 'EM COLD"

THEY had remained as long as they dared without being carried to the next stop, in the hope that some one Irving knew might be on the platform and sight them traveling *de luxe*. It would not be part of Irving's plan to look out and see if the "Harper girls" or a stray "town sport" might be there, for he was to appear casual and unconscious of his reception.

Irving pulled his coat in place and adjusted his tie, not one from Hoggins' Arcade, but something new in shoe-string scantiness. Irving had gotten the hint from a theatre programme on "What the man will dare to wear." He thought much of what this tie would do to provincial minds.

He gave it an extra tap against a striped blue collar and picked up Boots' traveling bag and a red leather, trunk-like vanity case and looked Boots over critically as she passed him in review. He found no fault except some dust on her slippers. These he told her to wipe on

his trouser legs. Done! Now he was ready.

The view of the platform from the Pullman door revealed an area of empty planks. So far, there was little prospect of bagging a gloat. However, what envious eyes might not be lurking close by the side of the long train?

IRVING descended first and made a mental note of the carpeted stool as the porter bent down with the immaculate bags, and another mental note of the crisp bill he could not afford that went into the porter's white glove.

He held out his hand to Boots and, guiding her round, powdered arm, swung the "swellest jane" that Warsaw had ever seen inside the gates of the town. Irving had set himself in readiness to bow through a gaping crowd. His hand was already going to his hat, a soft pearl gray with the creases conforming to the latest dents of fashion.

"Crescent Hotel! Crescent Hotel!"

Irving looked around. Boots was already facing the only human being on the platform and that only human being was calling again:

"Crescent Hotel; take you right up!"

Was this Warsaw, the town of his birth? Had the name of a strange hotel from the mouth of a man that he had never seen turned him into an alien?

"Crescent Hotel!" Could six months of his absence from Warsaw have wrought this Aladdin's magic?

Irving had suffered a setback, had glimpsed a rift in the golden welcome he had expected. Empty—empty—except for a man, a stranger, waving his hand in welcome toward a step hung from the rear of a bright green automobile. Irving was dazed, cold, his senses numbed.

Never in his life had he seen the station so empty. The "six-fifty-three" used to be well received when Irving lived in Warsaw. It was almost a social event, for, on every working day, a certain strata of society foregathered to wave farewell to some fifty girls that worked in Warsaw's button factory and lived in nearby towns.

Where were they? Might the factory be closed? Disappointment number one drew a white mark across the blackness of Irving's mind.

Irving's father or mother in their letters had always fed him with bits of the town's doings, but on opening their letters Irving had always been too diverted by the sight of the crumpled bills that nestled in the folds of the solicitous scribblings to note more than their comforting presence.

The daily happenings of Warsaw irritated him. Some of his laxity in reading them was intentional. He didn't want to hear anything of Warsaw until he appeared in Warsaw's midst. Until then, Warsaw might perish, providing it sat up and took notice at his arrival.

Then, in that great moment of his alighting from the Pullman, he would open his hungry ears to "Ah, it's Irving Lippit. Well, well—yes, to be sure, it's Irving Lippit."

HE now remembered dimly some letter from his father in which he wrote that Herbert Pendleton had bought the old Worth House and had given it a coat of paint—or was it a name? —yes, named it the "Crescent House." The unforeseen weight of this memory staggered Irving.

The knowledge brought alternatives of patronizing the Pendletons or cutting short his strutting and driving with Boots, over very bad roads, to the Lippit homestead twelve miles out of town. This was a devastating thought to one who had

visioned himself stifled by the press of envious Warsaw.

"Crescent Hotel!" came with a strong urge from the bus driver.

"No, not by a damn sight!" Irving ground his teeth against giving up one penny of his to the Pendletons. The possibility of Herbert Pendleton being the proprietor strengthened his resolve.

"Crescent Hotel!" came again from the bus driver, shrill and penetrating like a call for help. Little staccato echoes came from a row of freight cars on a siding at his back.

"Crescent Hotel," said Boots, pitching her voice so that it would carry to their only audience, the bus driver. "Is this the home of the Shriners?"

"Yes, Miss, they live right across the track, right over the Widow Spiedlitz."

Before the bus driver had spoken, Boots had gained considerable momentum in a noisy laugh that she had boisterously launched at the finish of her question. It grated just a trifle on Irving; just a trifle against the absence of the hurrahs he had expected.

Irving fixed his dissaproving gaze on Boots' face. He watched her wide crimson lips and the taut stretching of her dress across her breast. Her joke was inadequate to the boisterous display of appreciation. To Irving, even after he had worked it out, it wasn't so funny.

On through the words of the bus driver Boots' laugh mounted, until suddenly, at the mention of "Widow Spiedlitz," or at least at the termination of the bus driver's information, the laugh was cut short.

A suffocating choke clicked in Boots' throat and the broad crimson lips turned violet. The blood rushed from her face, leaving her rouge in patches on her cheeks. Then, with an impatient gesture, she tried to assemble her scattered senses.

Irving reached for her hand. It was cold and trembling.

"What's the matter, Boots?" he asked.

"What's the matter?" Boots' head went back, driven by a burst of hysterical laughter. "What's the matter? Why, we're knocking them cold. Ha, ha!"

Irving could have done the same thing—laughed with hot tears in his eyes. Poor kid, he thought, she feels about the way I do.

TO be rid of the station and the aggravating cry of the bus driver, Irving, to cover his embarrassment, picked up the traveling bags, heavy with Boots' finery and a little of his own, and moved toward a flight of sagging steps that led to the street level. Boots automatically followed, tottering along on her extravagantly high heels.

At the top of the steps, Irving suddenly dropped the traveling bags and looked quickly back toward the station. A cry of "Crescent Hotel!" came from the shadow of the deserted station. Irving waved impatience as a grind of gears shot the green bus up the incline toward him.

An exultant glow suddenly replaced Irving's embarrassed stare. Out of his gloom a comforting thought had come to buffet his antagonism toward the Pendletons.

Why not the Crescent Hotel?

Of course Fate was performing for his benefit. Was he not on parade? Was he not displaying Boots? And didn't Herbert Pendleton figure largely in his triumphal return.

Hadn't he always pictured Herbert in the front row of the grand stand as he, Irving, strolled leisurely past with Boots obviously under the spell of his fascination? Herbert Pendleton was to shrivel up in frigid envy.

Irving clicked his heels together and tipped his knees in.

"Red Hot Mamma—Red Hot Mamma!"

"What's it all about?" asked Boots.

"We'll knock 'em cold. Great surprise for you. Now, don't ask me, it's going to be a knockout."

And Irving intently scanned the new mental picture he had created of Herbert Pendleton behind the register of the Crescent Hotel as he approached with the dazzling Boots.

"Right in, sir, take ye right up." The bus driver, having vindicated his urge, put out his hand for the bags.

"I'd like to stretch, Irv," said Boots, tapping the tight back of Irving as he leaned over their new and ornate luggage. "Let the boob have the trunks. We'll walk."

Their bright golden luggage whirled up Main street, heralded by a honking horn. Crescent Hotel, over the door at the back of the green bus, faded into dust and night fell as Irving threw out his chest and pinched Boots' arm.

"Come on, Boots."

Boots crumpled the silver covering from a square of milk chocolate and tossed it over their heads. Irving, using one hand, snapped a blaze on a match deftly and with accustomed ease.

"Give us a puff, Irv?"

Boots drew a deep one. Her chest caved in with the heavy exhalation. Then she munched her bit of chocolate. Irving touched his tie and jingled some loose change with the key to his room at Mrs. Snyder's.

They started—jaunty, cosmopolitan. Three steps and Boots fell against Irving. She had turned her ankle on the uneven brick-paved street.

"Hell, Irv! Is this town paved with peanut brittle?"

CHAPTER X.

WELCOME

LIGHTS were showing in the houses on Hill Street as they walked under the towering elm trees and their thin sprinkling of new leaves. Lacy bowers bordered the walks to homes at which he used to shake his fist in passing. Ah! There was the Harper girls' house, silent and black in the shadows. There was Deacon Folger's place and Mattie Lewis' millinery store. There was Perkins' open lot between the Baptist Church and Merwin's, the wall paper hanger. Irving, when they had come abreast of it, looked into Perkins' open lot and received annoyance number two. The shaded front lawn stretched to a new house, pretentious and glistening in new white paint.

Piles of sand oozed out from between white spindles of an iron fence. Planks were piled along a walk that dimly stretched to the spick-and-span structure. A door opened, spreading light from a spacious hall. Men could be seen on step-ladders smoothing down long strips of colorful paper.

A girl appeared in the opening and seemed to be gesticulating rapturously in the presence of a tall, cadaverous individual, instantly identified by Irving as Bony Merwin, the wall paper hanger.

Who was the young lady? Who owned this house? His father hadn't written about it.

Six months ago this was a vacant lot—a grove where he and Steve Opaugh used to sink when they had gone too far with their gin.

In those moments when Steve snored, Irving remembered he had shaken his fist at the town and had promised to fill that very spot with the biggest house in Warsaw. Yes,

the biggest house, bigger than the bank, if Old Man Pendleton's niece, Martha Coleson, grew fonder of him.

As he stood enviously devouring the entire property, a flashing runabout drew up at the curb, and Irving, dizzy with the rapid stride of incidents, turned to look at the house again, when the young lady tripped along the path, calling: "Freddie—hoo-hoo."

Again Irving looked at the car and at Freddie. None other than Freddie Norton, a young man Irving had always disliked. Past Irving and Boots skipped merrily the young lady, waving bits of flappy cloth.

"The chintz came, Freddie. The wall paper looks darling in the hall." She waved the bits of cloth again. "I've picked the rose one for our bedroom."

Two supremely joyous young people squeezed tight together in the front seat.

Irving knew it all now. It was Martha Coleson, the niece of old Pendleton, to whom Irving had written a letter on the day of his departure from Warsaw; Martha Coleson, to whom Irving had boasted of what he would show Warsaw on his return. It was Martha Coleson who was now slipping her hand tenderly over Freddie's on the wheel.

"It's perfectly dear, Freddie. Merwin says we'll be in by Monday."

The starter whirred and the brakes spread their grip when Irving could have sworn that the young lady said: "Think the house is safe, Freddie? That man and woman looked queer to me."

The car drew away from the curb and another chalk-mark was drawn on the blackboard of Irving's mind, for Irving had seen Martha Coleson, the happy wife of Freddie Norton and all the Coleson wealth, going in sporty cars and happiness for them.

WITH his head down, Irving walked on. A broad chest flaring an official badge gleamed at the street crossing and Irving recognized in Dan Cassidy the one and entire police force of Warsaw. Irving pulled Boots toward him.

"That's Dan Cassady, old friend of mine—*not!* I'll ask him where the Crescent Hotel is, just to see his face when he sees you."

A few steps brought them in the shadow of the broad official chest.

"Officer, just where is the Crescent Hotel?" Irving asked.

He deliberately evaded the questioning look he had expected by arranging his hat to cover most of his face. The look came; Irving felt it, but kept his eye fastened on the polished shield waiting for an answer.

"This is Grove street. Turn up here and keep on till ye come to Bulger street. Right on the corner."

"Thanks," said Irving, and, drawing close to Cassady, he removed his hat, letting the light from an arc fall full in his face. Dan would surely know him now. But Dan's eyes were searching the shadow of Boots' picture-hat.

"Thanks, Chief," said Irving, hoping to dislodge Dan's interested gaze.

"That's nothing—it's easy to tell ye where the Crescent Hotel is. Lots of folks don't have to ask where it is. They just somehow know."

Cassady was talking out of the side of his mouth and Irving was disturbed by the fixed direction of his eyes.

"Quiet town, isn't it, officer?" was Irving's next lead for recognition.

"Yes, young man—been quiet for the past six months."

"Why six months?" asked Irving, hoping that the fixing of a date in the town's somnolence might concern his own departure from Warsaw, which was six months ago.

Dan's answer made it quite evident

that Irving was very much concerned with the peace of the town.

"Well, six months ago, the noisiest scallawag that this town ever had went off to New York. Him and his side partner, Steve Opaugh, spent all their days makin' gin in a quarry so's they could use it up nights keepin' folks awake. Steve just staggered up the street. He's our town drunkard."

Cassady drew a long breath. Several times during his recital he had shifted his position, but not once did he take his eyes from the black shadow that enveloped Boots' face.

"Now this bum, Opaugh, had a partner named Lippit. Irving Lippit. This wild harum-scarum Lippit boy, I hear, is a good-for-nothing bum in New York. That is, Herbert Pendleton, son of our richest citizen, tells me so."

Suddenly Cassady's body shook with laughter.

"He don't dare come back. No, siree. Since, if he does, I'll nab him for runnin' a still."

Irving quickly pulled his neat, pearl-gray fedora down over his eyes.

"Glad he's away. We like quiet," Irving said, edging away from Dan. "Thanks about the hotel, Chief." Irving waved his hand as if to withdraw.

"Oh, I guess you'll find it all right. 'Tain't run the way it should. When it was the Worth House it was bad enough. This tackin' on a college club name didn't clean it up none. Takes in some funny folks."

Dan was heavily stepping toward Irving and Boots, and pompously advising and moralizing as he moved.

"Girls, ye understand—no baggage, no reputation, no nothins—bad ones. That don't do the town no good. Guess ye won't have no trouble findin' a room. It's about empty."

Cassady made one more attempt to search the shadow of Boots' hat, but Boots had slipped behind Irving and was tugging at his coat. Irving reached back and squeezed her hand and waved again to Cassady.

"Come, dear," said Irving, taking Boots' arm and drawing away from the police force of Warsaw.

"Is there a restaurant in this dump?" Boots asked sulkily.

"You bet there is. Clark's New York Café. You'll laugh your head off at the boobs, and it's just the place to swing that skirt. Come on. We'll knock 'em cold."

Past houses and people in the half dark, Irving Lippet and Babe Boots sauntered impudently toward the center of the town. As they neared the turn that would bring them into the town's business center, in a particularly shaded spot, a tall, slouching figure swayed from a fence and, barely missing Irving and Boots, brought up against a tree near the gutter.

Irving, consumed with a fever of expectancy of the possibilities around the turn of Main street, was unable to avoid the hand that fell with a jarring thud on his shoulder.

"Well, well," came an unsteady and guttural voice, weighted with a gust of alcoholic breath, "well, sufferin' mackerel, if it don't beat hell." The voice went high. "It's Irv, Irv, by God, it's my old pal Irv Lippit."

Irving pulled his natty shoulders from under the friendly swishing of his old friend. Boots backed timidly toward the fence and stared out of a patch of bright lamp-light at Irving and his drunken companion.

"Irv?" Steve Opaugh shook Irving's arm violently, his eyes intent with drunken impudence on Boots. Drunkenness urged a more familiar approach, but Irving was his friend, and he therefore curbed an inclina-

tion to become much more familiar.

Instead, he drew his mouth close to Irving's ear, and, imagining he was whispering, bawled at the top of his voice:

"Some pippin!"

Irving roughly pushed him aside. Balanced against the tree, Steve stared past Irving to the fully illumined face of the timorous Boots. Then he straightened up, blinked and ran his nervous fingers questioningly over his mouth and chin.

He took several unsteady steps, his eyes widening as he advanced on Boots. Suddenly he shot his hands deep in his pockets; lowering his head, he stared straight into her face, made a clown-like whirl and landed back against Irving's shoulder.

"Well, I'll be gosh-darned!" Throwing his head back toward Boots, he furrowed his face in a quizzical demand. "Hain't——?"

"Shut up, Steve, you're drunk."

And Irving was far from gentle with the shove that accompanied his words.

"Drunk or no drunk, hain't—?"

But Irving broke in on Opaugh's muttering.

"Go on home—get out, will you?"

"Why, say, Irv—"

"Shut up."

"Drunk or no drunk, say, Irv, ye hain't married? Course ye hain't."

"Say, Steve, you'll get this in the jaw."

Irving shoved his fist hard against Opaugh's chin. The latter hung his head above the clenched knuckles and frowned heavily on his old friend.

"I'd rather have a sock in the jaw than be you."

Opaugh swung away from the clenched fist and half fell behind the tree.

Hurrying to Boots and gripping her arm, Irving pulled her past the slumping form and then passed on.

A feeble wave of a long, disjointed arm came out of the black bulk at the bottom of the tree.

"Bye, Irv, rather . . . sock in . . . jaw . . . than be you. That is, if you're married."

Irving and Boots turned the corner as Steve reached in his hip pocket.

CHAPTER XI.

MATRIMONY

MAIN street, luminous under spreading elms, gave Irving a chance in a loud voice to ridicule it's provincialism.

"Some shop!" said Irving, waving his chamois gloves toward Hoggins' Arcade. "That's where I used to get my hair cut. That's the Warsaw *Eagle;* some sporty sheet, that is! That's where the band practices every Thursday night. That's Doc Allan's—he cured me of the mumps. There's—ah, there we are—Borton's Drug Store."

Irving could see old Henry Borton past the red and green beacon lights that flanked each end of his drug store window, his eyes behind thick magnifying glasses glowing like chunks of sulphate of copper in one of the glass jars on the drug shelves above his head.

With Boots closely hooked to his side, he entered the store. Counting themselves as customers, there were just two others, two "town rummies" left over from the days of a great freedom, now seeking solace at the nearest thing to a bar. Never in his life could Irving remember seeing the store so empty, almost desolate.

He drew out a chair for Boots and one for himself and sat down to ponder on the scantiness of his audience. He was still wondering, when Dan Wibble, one of the men at the soda fountain, making wry faces in an effort to make Ginger Ale taste like

Old Crow, turned to his companion and said:

"Who do ye s'pose won the game, Lem?"

"Well, if the Warsaw boys was on their own ground, there wouldn't be no doubt about it. They say that the Basket Ball Hall in Troy is awful tricky. Seem's that the Troy boys has rigged up a light so's it shines in the Warsaw boys' eyes."

This was enough. Irving knew why the streets were silent, and his spirit was being felt out by the jabbing fist of disappointment.

A few irritating taps had landed and his inflated spirit was undergoing an aggravating soreness in deflation. It all was the result of over-confidence in training or more likely the lack of training at all.

Here they were at Borton's soda fountain, a living reality of his many visualizations of this very spot.

Where were the nudging young blades of the town? The side glances, envious and knowing? Where the admiration for Boots from the factory girls, curdled by her beauty into sour resentment? Where were the line of white discs from pressed noses against the big window on the street? Where the gaping, wondering crowd, serving the dazzling Boots in slavish admiration? Where the green filament over the eyes of the young men of Warsaw?

At a basketball game in Troy!

Central Park would have been just as effectual for Irving's purpose. Here there was nothing left for him to do but try a bit of practice work on old man Borton and wait for the morrow, when Boots would be Mrs. Irving Lippit.

"What will you have, young man?" asked Borton.

Irving smiled and gave his order direct to the big gold chain double-looped across Mr. Borton's shiny vest.

"A flip of orange and a dip of tincture," Irving said very quietly.

It was the request he always made for orange phosphate, put in this fashion now, as in the old days, for the sole purpose of riling crabbed old Borton.

Boots gave her own order for a strawberry float, which Borton filled and placed before her. As she drew a slender pink column up through the straw, she could see the old man's eye widen in a stare at the neatly creased top of Irving's new Fedora, while Irving repeated his order—"A flip of orange and a dip of tincture."

But Borton turned to Dan Wibble and filled an order given in more sanity than Irving's, and with a stony look at Irving's bowed head, beckoned to the new clerk.

"William, come wait on these folks." And he moved to the rear of the store.

"Say, Irv Lippet, why don't you say what you want? That guy ain't wise to that. Nobody is. Ye can't get any hootch here, so shoot the plain request and swallow the rotten stuff and get out."

Irving looked at this vision on the wire stool with whom he had hoped to knock the town cold; and he did not ask again, but slipped from his chair and asked the vision if she had quite enough.

"I had that before I tasted it," she said icily.

Irving paid for the soda and lit a cigarette. So far he had made no dents in Warsaw's battlements. A telephone booth recalled to him the necessity of telephoning to the Crescent Hotel for a room.

Irving had been so consumed by his desire to humble the town of his birth that he allowed his watchful eye to wander from a breach in the line of his advancing forces.

Matrimony!

He had been too eager to alight

from the train to remember the Reverend Luther Brocklebank and the ring folded in the cotton wadding in the corner of his vest pocket. That was the easiest part of his campaign against the fall of Warsaw—marrying Boots.

A few moments, a few words, a certificate bearing proof of their alliance. . . ah. . . all of this could wait. Were not his plans craftily arranged? Everything was to be a surprise. He could not announce his descent on Warsaw. To notify the Reverend Luther Brocklebank of his intention was to send a spy ahead of him and warn the populace of his appreach. . . . No, stealth with the banner of decency unfurled. A quick alighting at the Reverend Luther Brocklebank's and then General Irving Lippit would inscribe to the articles of surrender the union with Boots with moral sanction on the Hotel's register.

But "The best laid plans of mice and men aft gang agley." As Irving moved nearer the stand and telephone booth he perceived someone behind the glass panel.

Its occupant was suddenly revealed as Herbert Pendleton, grown quite fat.

"COME, Boots, let's go." As they walked out of the store together she was fully aware that the chalk-marks of disappointment on the blackness of his mind were beginning to look like a fall of snow.

On the sidewalk, in the green and red shafts of light from the apothecary's shop, Boots pressed her vanity case against her stomach.

"I don't suppose that this town knows what lobster *a la king* is, do they, Irv?"

"Hungry?" asked Irving.

"I'll say I'm the shipwrecked Movie Queen. Come on, Irv, this town must have soda crackers. What's up the street?" She was pointing to a window a few doors away from Borton's Drug Store where a blackboard stood crossed with smeary white writing.

"That's Clark's New York Café," said Irving. "Used to be pretty good."

Boots led Irving with an eagerness that was not reciprocated. Clark's New York Café occupied a narrow strip between a laundry and a closed hardware store and there was a sticky thickness of cooking coming through the bulging net doors as they entered.

One or two people sat at tables covered with white oilcloth. In the center of each table, for anchorage against a swirling fan on the top of a cabinet phonograph, there leaned in many directions dull lead castors with dried mustard and catchup bottles.

Nothing can be said about the meal that Boots and Irving leaned over. It was just what Clark had and always had had. Canned clam chowder, cold ham, doughnuts, coffee, cole-slaw, and cup custard. Irving ate mincingly with one last longing hope that Clark, whom he knew, might come through the door from the kitchen. But he never came!

"Give us a little music, Phi," called out one of the girls at a table near Irving, and the waiter that had served them turned on the phonograph. Fate must have sat up all night preparing Irving for the many jolts he was getting, for out of the open door in the cabinet came: "Kiss me, I'm yours."

Instantly tables shed their oilskins and yellow moons came out of trellised walls. Boys and girls were moving to purring saxophones—dusky tropic nights—pink heels and clanking beads—Boots in his arms and the music—music—the leader—the little peppy kid in grotesque antics in the center, waving time with a luminous baton.

Irving pushed back his chair and watched Boots munch cole-slaw and wiggle her body with the music.

"Come, kid, let's beat it," he said with a sinking at his heart.

On the sidewalk again: "We've forgotten something, Boots."

"Don't tell me, Irv, that there is more to this town. I just couldn't stand it." She gasped and leaned on Irving's arm.

"No—not the town—us—this."

And Irving held up in the flooding light of Borton's Drug store a tiny glistening circlet, the ring dipping it's glittering span from a dull wad of cotton.

"Think it's worth while, Irv?" she asked through a yawn.

"What's—what's worth while?"

Irving's eyes widened, his jaw fell. He gasped at the placid mascara-laden eyes of his companion.

"I mean, Irv"—she curled her vermilion lips in disgust—"we hopped up here to give this town a jolt, and"—with biting sarcasm, Boots threw back her head and laughed—"Irv, we've done it—pretty."

"Tomorrow, Boots, it will be different," Irving urged. "Come on, Boots; the preacher, Mr. Brocklebank, lives right around the corner on Elm street."

They moved away from the glare of Borton's drug store and turned up a dark, narrow side street.

"There it is—that house—the while with the other arm tight everything—great."

Irving pointed across the street while with the other arm tight through Boots' arm, his fingers were turning over the ring in his vest pocket.

Irving and Boots stood on the door step. The clanging of a bell had died to a tinkling far echo as the door opened. Irving quickly removed his hat and stared up into the cold scrutinizing face of a middle-aged woman. She was wiping her hands on her apron as if she had been unnecessarily pulled away from some household duty.

"Is the minister in—Mr. Brocklebank?" Irving asked, as the tall figure leaned out into the darkness and adjusted her glistening silvered spectacles.

"Are you Irving Lippit?" she asked in a voice that seemed to have been made to read off the names of the condemned. Irving shivered. The voice penetrated his body like coming out of a hot room into driving sleet.

"Yes, ma'am, that's me. I'm Irving Lippit. I came—I want to—we want to get——"

Irving's words were directed against a hard, uncompromising profile. This female, adamantine keeper of the Reverend Luther Brocklebank's parsonage, had glued her little bead eyes on Boots. The hawk-like profile seemed rubbery to Irving. It seemed to stretch out in frightful aggressiveness toward Boots' face.

"And you, young lady!" the woman asked, pointing a long, bony finger close to Boots' eye.

"I'm——" stammered Boots.

The door was closing on a voice that cut like a knife.

"I wasn't sure."

Irving and Boots looked at each other, bewildered, shaking. Quickly the door opened on a crack and the same voice, still as edged as before, added:

"The Reverend Luther Brocklebank went to Troy with the Y. M. C. A. basketball team, and"— her voice was suddenly pointed to an inconceivable sharpness—"and, Irving Lippit, ye don't deserve it, but ye ought to be glad that the minister's out of town."

The door slammed. A bolt clicked.

"Sap!" cried Boots, kicking at the closed door and hitting Irving on the knee. "You old . . . withered—what do you know about that, Irv?"

"I don't know anything about it," Irving answered gloomily.

THEY turned from the house, Boots snapping with indignation.

In a fumbling, tired way, Irving was thinking of substitutes for the minister of his family's faith.

Somewhere on Main street, Irving saw a man he had slightly known.

"Good-evening, Mr. Webster," Irving said, as the man was about to pass.

"I think—I'm right—no, don't tell me—I'm sure of it—you're Bert Tewilliger." The man's voice was soft and purring.

"No, I'm Irving Lippit."

"Oh, to be sure. Yes, yes—your pop kept the quarry—that is, didn't keep it—oh, I didn't mean to say anything embarrassing. Well, young man, how are you?"

"Not so good. I wanted to get married, but the preacher's in Troy."

"Too, too bad—that is, if you are in a hurry. The Town Hall's closed for the night. Justice of the Peace Perkins is very ill in bed. I just left him. Don't think he could marry you—that is—ha, ha!—he's out of his head. It does seem, Mr. Lipstick, that you are out of luck—yes, out of luck. I might emphasize that."

And Mr. Webster gave Boots a smile so daring that she thought she was at Honey House.

"Good-night," said Irving and pulled the susceptible Boots away.

"Well, Irv, we've knocked them cold. Now let's hit the hay."

Taking Irving's arm, she dropped her curly head on his shoulder.

"Seepie, honey?" she breathed languidly.

Irving did not answer. His spirit was overcast and sleep was the last thing he desired but for its forgetfulness. Honey House might divert, but it now seemed so remotely heaven-like to aspire to even in meditation that Irving cast about him for more intimate resources at hand.

They came—or *it* came—Warsaw.

No, he wanted to forget Warsaw. He had exhausted it and it had exhausted him.

For six months he had concentrated on the fall of Warsaw. Now he wanted to forget it and the first straw that floated on his troubled consciousness he grasped and held firm. It was his room at Mrs. Snyder's and the perpetually half-darkened hall, and Miss Mary Bates and the brilliant theatrical sign across the street. How strange that in New York he always thought of Warsaw and how perverse that here in Warsaw he wanted to think of New York.

He wondered if there might be a telegram at the station from Miss Bates about the missing leader of the orchestra at Honey House. To Irving, it wasn't deception in not telling Boots about his request for knowledge. It was that Boots might be stupidly jealous of something she couldn't understand.

What, after all, was Honey House without its orchestra? And wasn't its perfection part of the joy of being with Boots? He only felt that he had more taste for good things than Boots, and that a protective and instructive spirit guided him in preserving the best there was for her.

As they sauntered in the soft night air toward the Crescent Hotel, he became aware that he used to like whistling the latest jazz heard at Honey House to Miss Bates and somehow he could remember how remarkably quick she was in getting its intricate changes, whistling and strumming it out on a cracked ukelele. Miss Bates should have a chance. She loved music.

And perhaps that song she had just written—"Come back, when you're tired, to me"—might be sponsored by the wonderful little Wizard of Jazz at

Honey House. Should he talk to Boots about it? No, he thought not.

If the God of Good Luck smiled, Miss Bates could study and perhaps she might get her chance. Certainly the little leader of the orchestra was far more unattractive than Miss Bates, although Boots had told him that some of it was make-up. Why, Miss Bates was mighty close to being pretty, only she always looked so pale. She didn't rouge. He wondered what she would look like with just a little color.

If she only had Boots' chance. But no, Boots had beauty and Miss Bates had only beautiful hair, and now that he was seeing Miss Bates, her eyes were quite large and had depths like moonlight on the water under the bridge over Kirby's pond. And her mouth, pale, but tender—and, by the way, what was Boots mouth like? He had never seen its vermilion cover off.

"What's the matter, baby, is oo afwaid of the big cwowd?" asked Boots.

"No," said Irving, in a brusque, masculine voice.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BACON

THERE was one thing about Boots that Irving, until now, had not been quite sure was or was not an attraction in her social attributes. Now he was sure it wasn't—it jarred just a trifle. She declined seldom to immature years, but when she did it seemed so perfectly suited to her actual mental caliber that Irving was beginning just now to think that natural speech of her actual age was quite beyond her.

"Angwy, tweetie?" chirped Boots in a baby lisp close to Irving's ear.

"No," said Irving, in a brusque, remark brought them in front of the Crescent Hotel.

Irving and Boots both instinctively affected a good front and marched through the hall to the office. Boots dropped the affectionate grip on Irving's arm as they passed an opening into a general lounge room. Here she slid into a big arm-chair, leaving Irving to arrange the business of their stay. Terms bored Boots. Irving marched on, but a little bit wavering. Suddenly he was confronted with a giant with flowing beard and piercing blue eyes standing over the open register. He looked like St. Peter and Irving shivered in a conviction that the man had a supernatural knowledge of all things.

Irving looked at the open register and at the conveniently near pen and ink, then asked: "I had some bags brought up from the station. Are they here?"

"Yes, sir. Behind the counter here. Do you wish a room?"

Irving choked at the mild, sweet voice from the leonine head towering over the desk. The voice continued in dulcet sweetness:

"Rates are—single room, five dollars. Double room, seven by the day, payable in advance."

"Two single rooms, please. I've got a young lady with me."

Irving was trying desperately to appear casual, but his suppressed agitation leaked out of his elbow, and he tipped a potted rubber plant to the floor.

"Guess we can fix you both up. Your room will be seventy-one, fourth floor. The young lady's, a very nice room, will be nine, one flight up, in the front."

A big, shiny penholder dripping indigo ink was being pressed toward Irving's trembling fingers. The register was turning ponderously his way on a weezing oak turntable. The heavy blond beard of the night clerk hung like a pink haze between Irving's hand and the light.

He scratched out nervously his own name and address, New York, and had just scraped out in embarrassed agony the name of his companion, Miss Betty Flannagan, New York City, when a voice, high pitched, exploded over his head.

"Boy!"

Irving jumped. He thought the high-pitched squeal coming from the patriarchal clerk was meant for him and that he was about to get the most complete call down of his life, when a long, slender hand slid over the counter like a pink shovel and gave two sharp raps on a bell.

A little black man popped out of a chair near the desk and, scudding low under the counter, returned instantly, swinging Irving's traveling bags. The clerk, in exchange for Irving's yellow bill, extended two keys, jangling, dull-edged circular saws, with a number dented in their centers.

At this moment Boots turned the corner from the entrance hall and slid her arm affectionately around Irving's neck. Irving, who was stuffing his change in his pocketbook, looked up and, tapping the loose hand over his shoulder, turned to Boots. Her eyes were hard and seemed to be riveted on something back of the desk.

Irving, wondering, followed her gaze and saw the grizzled hotel clerk smile and one eye draw down slowly, knowingly. Irving turned quickly toward Boots. He had to turn all the way round, for Boots had shifted her position back of Irving. Her face was white.

A soft, trilling voice came over the counter:

"Excuse me."

Irving turned and saw spectacles adjusted close to the register. A long finger ran under the still damp ink. The clerk raised his head.

"Mr. Lippet — eh, hem — there seems to be some mistake."

And the clerk, dipping a pen, drew a pint of indigo ink through the still damp signatures.

"Sorry, but we are full up. Conference, Old Home Week, Button Factory Convention. Very, very sorry indeed, sir."

Then a long, thin arm, like a rake, extended past Irving.

"Moses, the keys, please."

Irving, dazed, heard them clink on a blackboard over the office safe. Boots was pinching his arm and Boots' voice, whispering, vindictive, came close to his ear:

"The big stiff, he's lying!"

Irving shook her hand free and turned to the little black man, smiling and still holding the heavy traveling bags. Irving was shaking, stupefied. Things were a little blurred. For a more orderly retreat from the hotel, he fastened his eye on an ice cooler and walked toward it.

"Cooler's empty, sir," came a mild voice at his back. "The railroad station, if it's open, is the nearest place this time of night. You'll find the time-table pinned to that wall. Here's your money."

Irving took it and turned to see the bearded giant sink back of the counter, spreading the Warsaw *Eagle* like a wall between them.

Irving snatched the bags from the grinning black Moses and started toward the hall. He could see Boots in a mirror defiantly swish past the desk, lean over and snap her fingers back of the spreading newspaper. And he could also see Moses dash to the desk and lean over and hurriedly talk to the back of the spreading Warsaw *Eagle*.

A telephone bell sounded sharp and insistent at the desk. A click, and then the soft, velvety voice of the clerk floated after them.

"Yes, Mr. Pendleton, sir. It was

the party you telephoned about. Very close to making a mistake until she came in. Moses recognized her at once. It seems she borrowed two dollars from him when she was here before."

Part of this conversation was audible to both Irving and Boots, but sudden activity on Boots' part made it impossible for him to hear more, even if he had been so inclined.

THEY had reached the railroad station, just how or by what route Irving could not tell. Heavily he walked to the furthermost end of the platform, followed by the yawning Boots, and sat on the edge of a baggage truck and dangled his legs in the cold night air of Duchess County. Boots jumped up by his side.

"God! When will it come?"

It was Boots who threw this blasphemous impatience into a cold and twinkling starlit sky. She shivered a bit and jerked a fur piece tighter about a powdered neck, then straightened her body and smoothed down her gloved hands over her hips to the folds of a crimson silk shirt, picked them out daintily and placed them voluminously on either side, like sofa cushions.

It was second and first nature for Babe Boots, night or day, in private or in public, even alone, to preen her silken plumage for the admiring eye of any and all men. Figuratively, in the acquisitive eye of Babe Boots, a man always stood in her line of vision.

It wasn't for Irving Lippet that she was now using her lipstick and powdering her little turned-up nose with a puff that floated a white cloud of violent Peu d'Fleur. Boots was thorough, that's all, and always prepared. At any moment the train might arrive and who can tell what lonely old fool might be dozing in a Pullman chair.

It has been asserted that Boots was thorough. So she was, for next came her garters. They were pulled tight and snug, and the trailing bands of her silk skirt, trimmed with white rabbit fur, rippled against a pair of brilliant bronze slippers, open over the instep and covering the ankle with a basket weave of thin red straps.

"Give us a cigarette, stingy."

Presently Irving jumped from the truck and paced a feverish circle about the planked platform.

"Stop that, Irv, you make me nervous."

But Irving did not stop. He walked faster and faster and faster, whipped along by the lash of growing suspicions, disillusionment and the wreck of his dreams. A dizziness overcame him and he leaned against a telegraph pole and said things over to himself again.

And those that had already the good fortune in seeing her earlier with Irving at Borton's soda fountain would tell the feverish Herbert that she was—was—was——

The word was nearly out. It had forced its way to the tip of his tongue. It seemed as if it had slipped from the sly eyes of the night clerk at the desk of the Crescent Hotel and had come to life on Irving's tongue.

Hadn't Boots pinched Irving's arm at the desk when the clerk had said sorrowfully that they were full up?

That—oh, great God! He must go on with his thoughts to a night at Honey House in New York when he had first seen Boots and had thought he had seen Herbert Pendleton.

So Pendleton was the "guy she shook!"

His thoughts were rolling like heavy freight along the tracks of his

memory. Just how did the clerk at the Crescent House look when Irving had scribbled their names? Why, smiling, business-like and eager until Boots turned the corner from the hallway and leaned over Irving's shoulder at the desk? Then how did the clerk look?

Oh, there was no use in denying it. The clerk had smiled, then stared, then had frozen at the sight of her. He hadn't been stunned by her good looks. No, he had just resented his hotel being used in this casual manner.

Irving had so far kept his head above the flood of suspicion, but physically he was weakening. His knees shook, and with a pitiful groan he sat down on an empty egg crate and cried.

"What are you doin', kid? Acting? No, sweetie? Just got a cinder in your eye?"

Irving did not answer. Boots jumped from the end of the truck and swung with undulating hips to the forlorn figure on the empty egg crate.

"Say, do you mean to tell me that you didn't know what kind of a kid I was? Honest to Gawd? I just thought you wanted to show off. I give you my word of honor that——"

Out of Irving's closed hands there came a mumbling and blubbering sound.

"You married me."

"When?" was the shockingly loud answer from Boots.

But it brought Irving out of a terrible nightmare. He looked up through his fingers at her, impatient and tapping her toe against the egg crate.

"No, no, Boots, that's right. You didn't, but you would have tomorrow," said Irving with deep relief.

"Nuts! You're just nutty. Cuckoo," said Boots, and, disgusted, she wheeled about and walked over to the baggage truck, powdered her nose again and swung back to Irving.

"Your salary isn't so terrible when you get one. You like life and so do I, and see here, Irv," and Boots put her hand on the rumpled mass of hair that bent over the empty egg crate. Her voice had suddenly thickened:

"Say, kid, we're all right, all right, both of us. This town's a big joke and we both wanted to get back at it. We would have splashed, only they wouldn't let us. I've been dreaming of the button factory and Warsaw for years."

"Dreaming of the button factory and Warsaw for years? You've been here before?" came mumbling and far away in the closed hands of Irving Lippet.

"Yes."

"With Herbert Pendleton?" Still further away came Irving's voice.

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say that. But I was here before that."

"When?"

The question was so low that it was scarcely audible, but Boots knew that it must have been asked.

"I was born on Railroad Avenue. My name was Lotta Spiedlitz. My father kept a meat market—and—"

"*The bacon!* Great God!" Irving's voice was so low that the remotely distant whistle of the "two-twenty-six" local for New York smothered it.

SUDDENLY other unexplained happenings rained like sharp knives against his sore consciousness.

He couldn't look at Boots. Only her short-vamped foot, tapping impatiently before his dizzy vision. Even that blurred, and Irving found that his voice had gone out into the still night, aching with its terrible words.

"So that's what Dan Cassady suspected, eh? That's it—that's it. So

that's why Steve Opaugh wanted to get fresh with you—that's it. The woman at the minister's—everyone of them—all of them—that man Webster! You would have flirted with him. The clerk at the Crescent House. Herbert Pendleton. The whole town—all of them. You—damn you! Go away!"

Then a long silence—both immovable, as if they were in sound sleep. Far away sounded the whistle of a train, then the reverberating grind over the mile of track up to the glowing semaphore and the "two-twenty-six" slid wheezing like a tired monster out of a black hell into the Warsaw station.

"All aboard! New York local!" yelled the conductor.

Irving picked up two traveling bags, immaculate and unmarred by usage, and followed after the tripping Boots toward the steps as a flood of noisy young men, returning from the basketball game at Troy, emptied out from the two car ends. At the sight of Boots they cheered wildly and jostled with waves of approval to the platform, and, making a circle about her, romped like wild Indians.

Irving forced his way through a weak hand-clasp of two brothers, both very drunk, whom he knew, and pushed Boots toward the car steps. One of the brothers, loose in limb and behavior, tried to kiss Boots.

"You're some doll baby," he said, and went sprawling under the weight of Irving's new traveling bag.

The train was moving and Boots was waving her vanity case and throwing kisses to the wildly cheering crowd as Irving, assisted by the conductor, scrambled up the steps.

"Warsaw won," said the conductor, and only Irving knew how complete was her victory.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LAST LONG MILE

MILES and miles of blocked-out landscape. Miles and miles with Boots' head bobbing about on his shoulder; but, thank God, miles and miles away from Warsaw, and miles and miles nearer New York and his room at Mrs. Snyder's and a whole new idea of life. Once or twice, in her sleep it seemed to Irving, Boots powdered her nose. Once or twice she whispered some inane baby talk.

Purgatory was giving Irving its entire attention. The stops at the stations seemed to mark the degrees of torture to which he was being subjected. Wide-eyed and staring, slowly his memory ground out the six months of petty spite, of concentrated ill-will toward Warsaw. A colossal ambition once, this spite was now a shriveled and puckered deformity.

Boots' curls blew down across his face, each one like a stinging lash in the hands of merciless devils. His shoulder ached, his eyes burned, he moved away from the whipping brown curl on his shoulder and let it dangle in the aisle.

But there is a limit to mileage and to pain, and finally the mileage, at least, was spent, and he found himself struggling with the two heavy traveling bags and the yawning Boots up the incline to the waiting room at Grand Central Terminal. It was now five o'clock. Boots had given up the key to her room and had sent her trunk to Miss Loger's.

There she went with one of the new shiny traveling bags and one of the yellow bills that Fleet Foot had brought to Irving. She could have taken every cent he had and thrown the pocketbook in the dirty pail that stood near them in the waiting room. She could now, if she desired, come

to his room and take his every earthly possession and sell it, so great was the surging thankfulness that his trip to Warsow had been a failure, that no one saw him, and that he had not married Boots.

THAT evening, after a day of confusion and vague thoughts of going to work at something, Irving lifted his tired legs in what seemed an unending ascension on squeaky boards to his room.

A gas jet cast the faintest light in the hallway. He swung heavily past striped red wall paper hanging like the soiled towel on the roller back of the kitchen door at his home in Warsaw. The loose balustrade swayed like a flexible walnut life line.

He pushed back his door, struck a match and lit the gas over his bureau. With a deep breath he sunk on his bed, apathetic, yet conscious of an inner soreness, the result of his many rebuffs.

He got up and, opening his windows, listlessly went about the unpacking of his shiny traveling bag, a task he had shrunk from in the gray of that morning. Some handkerchiefs, very new and stiff, tied crossways with a thin blue ribbon, marked with a stuffy L in the corners, which he tossed across to his bureau top, struck the roll of music that he had taken from Miss Bates, knocking it to the floor, where it fell against Irving's new dancing pumps.

For a few moments he regarded it with many slight, varying and indefinite emotions.

Then he reached out his stockinged foot and pulled the roll of music toward him. His emotions were gaining impetus, for when he reached for it his hand shook and when he read "Come back, when you're tired, to me," it was through watery eyes.

Quickly he dropped it and ran to Miss Bates' door. It was tightly closed. No streak of light from below showed on the well-worn carpet. He tapped—then louder. It resulted only in a call from the hall below from Mrs. Snyder.

"That you, Mr. Lippet?"

"Yes, Mrs. Snyder, it's me."

"Miss Bates hain't in."

"Thanks," answered Irving, very quietly, and with an indefinable sadness he stumbled to his room.

Suddenly his pace quickened. Irving was now dashing wildly at the bureau drawers for the shirts he had just put away. The rest of the things in the traveling bag were tumbled out on the floor. Feverishly he whipped out the folds in his Tuxedo and emptied the jingling contents of a cigarette box on his bed amidst his studs and collar buttons.

In his haste at his washstand, he gave Mrs. Snyder's faded wall paper an extra sousing and dipped into the big thick bowl, splashed in the suds and embarked on a new dream.

In ten minutes Irving was on the street with a roll of music under his arm. It was too early to go to Honey House. So Irving walked down Eighth Avenue, crossed to Bryant Park and sat on a bench, twisting the music roll and counting the tulip shoots in a path border.

Even after his late dinner Honey House would not open its doors for some hours, so Irving drifted into a moving picture show, where he avoided seven reels of a trusting country youth in the velvet grip of a scheming vampire by closing his eyes at the start of the harrowing scenes.

At about eleven o'clock, he hurried out and to Honey House. At the top of the stairs he met Miss Loger with Roy Beamer.

They did not see him. Irving squeezed through the crowd toward a secluded spot where he might be alone and unobserved by either of them and, more particularly, by

Boots if she were there. This latter wish was denied at once, for he very nearly stumbled over that fickle young lady, who at the moment was leaning close against the shoulder of a young man, a stranger to Irving.

Boots saw Irving and delivered an adamantine stare which he returned with a contemptuous curl to his lip. He found a chair at a table back of a mirrored column and sat down. Several dances went by with Irving piling cigarette ends on the little beehive tray.

He had been conscious of the little "fried egg" leader from the first; the surge of thankfulness at having escaped Boots, together with his unleashed joy at the privilege of once more basking in the uncanny melodies of the orchestra, seemed to tether his receptive sense. He wasn't sure it was not just a dream.

At the termination of another number, things cleared and he found himself clutching the music roll and staring at a clear open path across the dance floor to the "fried egg" leader.

Now was the time to get up and in sacrifice and unselfish spirit in the cause of Miss Bates' art go straight to the little genius. Irving, however, found himself unable to move.

He was fretting against his stalling muscles when the manager of Honey House passed his table. He had nearly gotten by when Irving pulled at his coat tail and brought him back to his side. Nervous and pale, Irving looked up to him, holding the roll of music against his shirt front.

"Can I be of service, Monsieur Lippet?" He bowed with Latin effusiveness.

"Here is a new song, Mr. Perot. Will you get the orchestra to play it? Please do it for me as a favor, will you?" and Irving slipped a ten-dollar bill into the manager's hand.

"Ah, zat ez mos *charmont*—I have already know what ze leetle ledair tell me of any new songs—to be play. Who has one—mus take zat one by zemselves across ze floor and present zemselves."

"Me?" said Irving, pointing at his own agitated self.

"Sure, *certainment*, I'll say it's se."

CHAPTER XIV.

"COME BACK, WHEN YOU'RE TIRED, TO ME."

IRVING rose, glanced in the mirrored column and made fleeting touches at his hair and tie. In the mirror he could see the little leader with her back toward him. Now was the time, and Irving pushed back his chair and advanced through the noisy groups at the tables surrounding the empty dance floor.

He felt suspended and somewhat insecure as he went, twisting the roll of music nervously about in his fingers and making awkward slipping side steps on the polished floor like a timid child on new ice. The circular space, now empty, seemed as vast as the Sahara desert to Irving and on a distant oasis flourished the little leader of the orchestra.

Her back was still turned toward Irving and she seemed intent on some musical educidation, her slender, bare arm waving gracefully while her little foot tapped out her emphasis.

Irving had a genuine reverence for this little nervous Jazz genius, and he felt at the moment as if he could feel no more nervous or confused if he were being presented at Court. He wasn't quite sure what to do when she turned and saw a young man, red-faced and embarrassed, extending toward her a roll of white paper.

Her eyes blinked and her hand went swiftly to that funny wide mouth, and Irving could now see the disfiguring thin red line carried out on each cheek past the limits of a much smaller mouth.

Boots was right. Some of it was make up; yet under that red blob on her nose and that self-applied split for a mouth she could be little else than ugly.

Her eyes were now quiet and wide and Irving, looking at her, paled under her fascinating ugliness. He stepped to the platform as the eyes slowly closed and she reeled back, falling against a big blonde girl with a cello.

Suddenly she opened her eyes and, avoiding his assistance, made a particularly ugly face at him and in a series of awkward but highly amusing gestures strummed the strings on the cello, tapped the kettle drum and terminated floundering whirls and stumbling steps in a dignified low sweeping bow under the eyes of the much embarrased Irving. This little incident brought a round of applause from the tables nearest the platform. One never knew just when this eccentric girl would invent some new form of amusement for the crowd and one particular patron of Honey House was never meant to know how near she had come to fainting. Irving now, without hesitation, blurted out his message.

"The manager, Mr. Perot, said if I brought this over to you, you—you—would play it." And Irving unfolded the roll of music.

A slender hand reached and took it, and another slender hand felt behind the voluminous folds of black silk "Apache" trousers for a chair. Holding the sheets up close to her face, she became intent in its reading, nodding her head and tapping the metal sides of one of the drums.

As she finished the pages, she passed them over to the big blonde girl with the cello with some comment inaudible to Irving. Then turning quickly toward him, she said, "I will play it," and disappeared in the group of musicians.

"Thanks," stammered Irving. "Thanks a lot." He recrossed the polished and slippery floor on winged feet and there sat motionless and confused. If—if only Mary Bates could be here with him! Think of the thrill of waiting for her own music to be played by the orchestra of Honey House. Think of what that little leader would put into it or pull out of it.

"Too bad the kid was out, most likely with her sister at the hospital."

He smoked furiously, crushing out his light each time he knocked off the ashes in the beehive tray. Suddenly a voice, the excited voice of the manager, Victor Perot, halted Irving's whirling thoughts.

"La-dees and gentle-men . . . I am to make ze announcement."

Monsieur Perot glided swiftly toward the orchestra platform. He bowed low in jointless salutation and plucked from his thin lips the gesture of a flippant kiss.

"La-dees and gentle-men. . ."

The little orchestra leader smiled and bowed low, moving like a mechanical doll. Again Monsieur Perot, with a fluttering sweep, caught the leader's hand and kissed it.

"Theese new song ees a waltz. . . A ver' new waltz. . . Eet is compose by Miss Mary Bates and is called 'Come back, when you're tired, to me.' I am tolt it is ver' nice words, a ver' nice sentiment. But ze Queen Bee of Honn-ee House say she can not sing et. She say she is no Tetrazini but I say she ver' pretty near Paul Whiteman."

THE hand and voice of Monsieur Perot faded into a suddenly descended darkness, the leader raised her luminous baton from the rose-trimmed railing, closed her eyes and pointed her little chin into a path of moonlight.

Irving's eyes fastened on the little leader. Her violin was held tightly

under her chin and the bow was drawn up to where her hands seemed to melt into the strings. Then it drew slowly downward and the opening bars of Miss Mary Bates' song took their first step toward fame.

It was a waltz with all its tender allurements but caught low in a tone of yearning. From her bow tip there seemed to spread about the crowded room invisible tendrils of an exquisite harmony. Here and there young men and young women in rapturous sweeps moved in the dream of it.

Honey House was quiet when she stopped. Waiters stood transfixed in doorways; bare hands lay mute on tables; fans lay in laps, quiet, like the wings of dead butterflies.

Suddenly a storm of applause shook the room, and girls and young men crowded over to the platform where the little "fried egg" leader stood swaying against the arm of the big blonde girl with the cello. Irving stood on his chair drawing moist streaks down the mirrored column with his damp, hot hands.

A hollow thought came to him—where was Miss Bates, the creator? Tomorrow night she would meet the interpreter. He knew them both, now.

Presently Irving could stand it no longer. Noise was making him hysterical. When he was less agitated he meant to thank the leader. He would only be laughed at now, stammering out his gratefulness. Besides, he could think of an immediate excuse for leaving Honey House to tell Miss Bates about his triumph.

He hurried out, took a taxi to his house and dashed up the stairs. The door was still closed and no response came from his loud tapping. Not even Mrs. Snyder could give him further information regarding Miss Bates. He must return to Honey House.

THE little while he had been away had quieted him and now he might be able to face the little leader. About this hour Irving knew that the orchestra came from a back door on Seventh avenue, and as the lights were being turned off in the purple glass columns at the main entrance, he walked to the Seventh avenue door and took up his nervous vigil. He wondered what she would be like with her hair down, with the red feather laid aside, and with street clothes.

Suddenly, none other than Miss Mary Bates bumped into Irving.

"You were there, inside, you heard it?" he gasped.

"Yes, I heard it."

"Did you hear them, the crowd? Kid, you're the biggest thing in the right kind of jazz in the world. Gosh! Didn't she put it over!"

"Was it jazz?" she asked solemnly.

"No, I'm sorry. No, not a bit. It was wonderful!" A gasping pause. "Are you waiting? I mean are you with this 'fried egg' leader?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Stand here and we'll wait."

And Irving drew Miss Bates under a lamp post at the curb. In its light he made a new and wonderful discovery—Miss Bates was not like *Miss Bates!* She was pretty; she had color; her curls rippled against the tint of pale roses on her cheeks. Her mouth—oh! it couldn't be! Yes, it might be—Miss Bates under the flush of a great excitement.

"You look wonderful, wonderful," Irving said simply. "You—why, you—you're pretty."

And then, as simply, Irving excused Miss Mary Bates' temporary good looks by adding, "Of course, it's the excitement—getting your music played—of course. Just a little

color, Mary—it's very becoming." Then, rapturously, "Mary, you're just wonderful."

"I feel wonderful, Irving, just wonderful," and her eyes glistened in a way Irving had never seen before.

"You know where that song of yours will be tomorrow? All over the world and you won't get it copyrighted and you won't get a cent."

"Please, Irving, I want to talk about you. You, not me."

She looked at him intently, from his shoes to the tiptop of his smooth straw hat.

"Why, I don't see Warsaw's scalp, and where, oh where, is our brave General Boots?"

"Don't talk about that. I'll tell you later. I'm sick of them both, and I want to forget." Irving looked away.

"You weren't married, then?" She was smiling.

"No, no, no! I was a terrible fool. And I won't talk any more—you're the important one—you're a genius—only—you haven't got any business sense. You're like that little devil upstairs. She's written some wonderful things that were copped by the music sharks and they reaped the harvest. They tell me she's a fool and works for nothing and everybody cheats her. Give me that sheet of music and I'll have it copyrighted at once. I'd like to be the business manager for *you two* girls."

AS his hand touched hers in circling the roll of music, a tenderness drawn to a surging need for expression flooded him in the twitching of Mary's hand.

"Look at me, Mary. Put your face up," he insisted huskily. His finger tips assisted in revealing her eyes, lustrous in joyous tears.

"Mary—crying. Don't, Mary—I feel like that myself. Come."

Irving drew Mary into the shadow of an alley that led to the rear of Honey House. "We'll wait for her here."

He lit a cigarette, walked hurriedly to the foot of the iron staircase and looked up at the lighted archway that led to the rear of Honey House. Suddenly he turned as Monsieur Perot, whistling Mary's waltz, emerged through the opening far above him. Irving skipped back to Mary's side and grasped her hands.

"Mary, do you hear that? It's Perot—your waltz. I told you—tomorrow everybody will have it. If that leader upstairs only had your—er—er—if she only had your——."

Impatiently Irving turned toward the stairway.

"What's keeping her?"

"You."

It was Mary's voice close to his ear. He turned as a little white hand slipped up and tugged at his shiny lapel. Then the hands, the arms, Mary—all of her—fell into an awkward, doll-like attitude, strangely familiar, that suddenly struck him as not imitative.

He could see Mary's hair stripped back; he could see a long waving feather; he could see and hear Honey House an hour ago.

"Mary, you're not——" Irving gasped.

"Yes, Irving—the 'fried egg' leader of——"

Mary and Irving drew sharply and suddenly closer as the jangling bolt of the iron door above closed in the watchman.

THE END.

The Sterner Penalty

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

THE seven associated pilots of Burrage Field circled the great new cargo-carrying biplane that stood on the line, and gazed at it with hungry eyes.

One thousand dollars to the man who tested it in flight! And it was autumn.

Their own planes needed new linen wings; their motors required tearing, overhaul, and repair; and their mechanics were beginning to intimate that they worked for something besides kind words and promises.

This was indeed manna from the kindly sky, for the number of customers coming to the field for ten-minute thrills would not increase until spring sent venturesome blood coursing through the earthbound veins of dwellers in the nearby city of New York.

"You've come to the right place," Dal Cochran assured the two men who stood beside the plane. "You couldn't get a better or more careful test anywhere on Long Island."

"Looks like a good ship, too," chirped little Sturgis, but at the moment he was gazing admiringly not at the big twin-motored airplane, but at the two strangers who possessed a thousand dollars and were willing to part with it so easily.

One of the two, who had introduced himself as Oliver K. Froule and his companion as James Lee, was a tall, prosperous-looking man with a loud voice and a commanding manner.

His eyes were quick in movement, like a bird's, and with much more power and decision in them than at first seemed likely from their watery light-blue color. His forehead was narrow, but the rest of his face was broader and well-proportioned.

The other man, Lee, was about the same height, close to six feet, but in other respects quite different. His clothes, though of good enough material, fitted him much too loosely, and had gone far too long without pressing.

His hair was more than half gray, and the skin about the outer corners of his eyes was wrinkled by his habit of half-closing his eyelids, as if to exclude the world from his attention.

His whole countenance was one which bore lines of thought rather than of action or command. Just now his expression was anxious and almost melancholy.

Pete Hendron, who was the oldest and, by many hours in the air, the most experienced of the seven pilots, addressed Lee when he spoke:

"Back in '12, when ships weren't the safe things they are today, I tried out one of yours—a monoplane—not far from this very field, Mr. Lee, I'll be glad to fly this one for you, if my partners are willing."

"A monoplane," repeated Lee musingly. "Yes; yes indeed, I remember

it—rather a successful craft, for its day. But—you speak as if all the danger had gone out of the air. It hasn't!"

He sighed, somewhat unexpectedly, and squinted without too much enthusiasm at the big cargo airplane whose wings towered above him.

"I'm afraid——"

"All right, then, boys; settle it among yourselves," Oliver K. Froule broke in, in his deep voice. "I know nothing about aviation so I'll rely on you. Any pilot you may select to test-hop—to try it out—will suit us."

"We will decide on one at once, then," said a voice that Froule had not heard before. "When do you want us to get her in the air?"

FROULE turned to the pilot in the background who had spoken, for there had been a certain amount of authority in his tone. He found himself gazing at Lacey Tremaine, a light-haired, brisk young man who looked the typical skillful, daring, and none too thoughtful pilot that is putting the whole world in the air.

As a matter of fact, Lacey Tremaine, although daring beyond the point of safety, was the least skillful flier of the seven, for he had the erratic nature of a genius. And he was easily the possessor of the best brain on Burrage Field.

He was field superintendent, director of personnel, and general passenger agent of the bunch, and he was also, when feeling so disposed, the life of the party.

"When?" repeated Froule, sizing up this open-faced young man in a glance. "Why, right now, of course."

Lacey Tremaine, his eyes sliding past Froule toward the hangar in which the plane had been assembled that morning, shook his head most regretfully.

"That's too bad," he said. "We have a hard and fast rule among ourselves here on Burrage Field that no new plane is to be hopped by any of us until it has been carefully inspected by several of us, and by Mr. Nelson, our technical adviser."

The other six pilots stared, more or less blankly, according to their various natures, at Lacey, and then at each other, at the ground, and at the plane.

It was no small compliment to Lacey himself that not one of them blurted out that he had never heard of the rule Lacey Tremaine cited so glibly, or of "Mr. Nelson, our technical adviser."

Big Bill Hostetter did, indeed, shuffle his right foot, an invariable preliminary to speech on his part, but Lacey, in moving to cast a most deferential glance at the plane, stepped on it, and Big Bill subsided without uttering a syllable.

Pete Hendron, who had been turning over in his mind Lee's remark about the dangers of the air, continued a most rigid scrutiny of the cargo ship whose testing was worth a thousand dollars.

Lacey spoke again, while Froule chewed his lip in frowning silence.

"But of course if we can't have Mr. Nelson here for you by to-morrow morning, early, we'll waive that part of it and look it over ourselves. Indeed, I'm afraid we wont be able to get Nelson here in time, for he may be still in Detroit. Of course"—he stressed the words—"we won't touch the plane, or even examine it unless you or Mr. Lee is present."

"Waste a whole day!" exclaimed Froule. He shook his head and hurried on determinedly. "Can't do it! Ridiculous! Won't you take our word that the plane is O. K.? Testing it is just a matter of routine."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, Froule," the inventor of the airplane interposed. "You know what——"

"Poof!" interrupted Froule. "Non-

sense, Lee. She's a wonderful ship—ah, airplane, that is. If you can't test it out now——"

HE paused significantly, and waved a hand as if depicting the flight of one thousand dollars from the neighborhood of Lacey and his partners to a remote part of the universe.

Lacey's six brother pilots shuddered. It seemed to them that Lacey was putting on entirely too much side. They were willing to gamble their lives but not with a thousand dollars at that lean time of year.

But Lacey, who was lighting a cigarette, did not reply. At least, he said nothing until he had succeeded in blowing a cloud of cigarette smoke skillfully up the line of his cheek into his right eye. This process indicated deep thought, but when he spoke, nothing but regret was indicated.

"Sorry," his gentle voice murmured. "Over on the other side of the field is a chap named Storbing—— Bill Storbing. He's an old ex-test pilot with only one leg, and he'll test anything at once. I suggest you try him now, for it will be too dark to fly in half an hour."

A sound of clearing throats, of voices beginning to make themselves heard in wails of protest, came from the flying men, but the strong bass of Froule quite drowned them out:

"Well, I don't want to be a crab, boys. And as Mr. Lee, the designer of the ship, seems willing, we will consent to wait a day. But of course it is understood that we will be present during this inspection of yours, and that you do not try to take the plane to pieces."

He eyed Lacey Tremaine with no friendly glance, despite the fact that his voice had been hearty in disclaiming crabbedness.

"Oh, the survey will not be exhaustive, I assure you," Lacey asserted. "Mr. Nelson and one or two of us will make sure the wings are buckled on, the struts sound—that sort of thing. We won't pry into your secrets."

"There is nothing that you may not see," Lee interposed. "The main feature of the plane—a device which has been patented—is a means of withdrawing within the wings the last end; in other words, reefing the eight feet of plane surface on either wing.

"Thus the plane, once it has been lifted by its entire supporting surface from the ground, will be unhampered by the resistance of unnecessarily large wings in its course through the air. But I feel that I must warn you gentlemen that——"

"They don't want to hear all that now," Froule broke in emphatically. "We'll tell the pilot about it before the flight, so he'll know how to handle the retracting gear."

"That time will do," Lacey agreed.

"The aircraft was most carefully assembled this morning under the supervision of both Mr. Lee and myself," Froule stated. "Although I know nothing whatever of airplanes I am sure it was done correctly."

"UNDOUBTEDLY," Lacey agreed. "From our hangars we saw the mechanics at work, but of course we didn't come over until you requested us to do so. A good many airplanes are assembled and tested here."

He craned his neck in the direction of the lone hangar.

"Where are your mechanics? You'll want them to roll her back into the shed."

"After the final motor test I sent them away," Froule answered. "It was foolish of me, I realize now, but my ignorance of airplanes was such that I thought all that was necessary was that a pilot get in and fly around in her."

"I was telephoning when he told them they might go," the inventor

explained, and something like a reproachful gleam lighted his quiet gray eyes as he surveyed his friend.

"It doesn't matter a bit; we'll roll her in," Lacey said. "Then Mr. Lee can take a last look at her before you lock up. By the way, have you a car here?"

He was not astonished when Froule explained that they had come in a taxicab, for the field around the shed was quite bare of automobiles.

"If you don't mind waiting a few minutes, while one of our mechanics finishes cleaning the spark plugs on our car, I'll be happy to run you over to your hotel," Lacey volunteered. "Taxicabs are scarce about the field at this time of year."

Froule accepted for both, and Lacey drew out his watch and frowned at it.

"Jim said he'd have the car running by about five o'clock," he said. "Suppose you walk over to our hangars in fifteen minutes? That will give you a little time here, if you need it."

The two men assented.

At a word from their field superintendent and general adviser the pilots laid hold of the heavy plane and began to roll her into the shed.

Lacey took his place beside Pete Hendron, under the nose of the ship, and as the two men tugged, he whispered swiftly:

"Pete! Stay here and pump old Lee for me. Find out what he knows about Froule. Follow up that talk about danger in the air."

Pete restrained an impulse to stare at his associate, and put his shoulder to the plane.

"Right," he grunted.

Lacey sidled along to the wingtip, where Dal Cochran was guiding the huge machine.

"Talk to Froule, Dal," he muttered hastily. "Give Pete a chance to pump old Lee."

"Even so, old sleuth," the pilot answered.

He had noticed Lacey's surreptitious word to Pete Hendron, and was not surprised at this order. He knew that something was up, and that Lacey's agile mind was hard at work.

Consequently, when Lacey and the other pilots retired, Pete was remarking, with the air of one about to reminisce, to the old inventor:

"It isn't often I run into an old-timer in aviation like you, Mr. Lee. Seems to be a game for infants—at thirty-five they think you're through as a pilot."

"Yes, yes," the designer of the big cargo ship agreed, without too much interest, for his thoughts seemed to be on his creation.

Pete did not press him, but watched with deep curiosity the retreating figures of the other pilots. Lacey walked close to big Bill Hostetter, and puffs of white cigarette smoke trailed in his wake. Sturgis and Lansing were ranged close behind the two, and both appeared to be silent.

Dal Cochran, Pete noted, had already intercepted Froule, and now had him cornered near the hangar.

"Indeed aviation is moving rapidly," Mr. Lee went on, politeness conquering his preoccupation. He smiled rather sorrowfully. "Sometimes I think it is moving too rapidly for me—that I am losing touch with it."

"Not when you can build a ship like that one, with contracting wings," Pete Hendron said, nodding toward the closed doors of the hangar.

BUT Mr. Lee shook his head, and the lines about his eyes deepened as he gazed with that peculiar concentration of his at the shed. To Pete it seemed that he was looking right through the walls, and examin-

ing with minute attention some detail of the great plane within.

"Building a plane and seeing it a success in the air are two different things," he replied, with deepening melancholy. "When Mr. Froule inadvertently interrupted me a few moments ago it was my intention to warn you that, although the models and shop experiments on this wing retracting device were a complete success, in actual flight the invention has been a failure. Two previous airplanes, constructed with the greatest care, have crashed. That is why we are offering a thousand dollars to fly it."

"Oh!" said Pete Hendron, and the interjection was long drawn out and emphatic. He shot a curious glance at the inventor. "It's certainly fair of you to tell us that. Of course it was up to us to run any risks blind when we agreed to test hop it."

"Naturally I would not send a pilot up in the air in such a craft without warning him," Mr. Lee said, in some surprise and slight indignation. "You do not think I would do that?"

"No, *you* wouldn't," Pete conceded. "But—have you any idea what caused the crashes?"

"Not the slightest," the designer said wearily. "I went over the wreckage myself each time as soon as I was summoned to the spot where the plane had fallen, but I could find no clue to the trouble. After the second I was almost completely disheartened. Only the courage and financial support of Mr. Froule led me to go on and build this latest plane."

"Then Mr. Froule is your backer?" Pete said. "Is he an old hand at the flying game, too?"

"No, he is, I am told, a manufacturer of mining machinery," Lee replied, and went on candidly: "I happened to meet him at an aeronautical engineering dinner, and he became tremendously interested in this device of mine. Despite the disappointments he has stuck to me throughout. A good friend. It is he who is supplying the thousand dollars we are offering; my own resources are gone."

"He is!" Pete exclaimed. "Then—"

But he interrupted himself as he saw that Froule had broken away from Dal Cochran, closed the door of the hangar, and was heading toward him.

"The old days were best, despite the danger," he was saying when Froule got within hearing distance. "Do you remember when Orville Wright stayed up for two hours and nineteen minutes back in 1908?"

"We'd better be getting along toward the car now, Lee," Froule announced briskly, and took the inventor's arm in a friendly grasp.

Dal and Pete fell in behind the two, and gradually, as they walked along the edge of the field toward the hangars of the associated pilots, they permitted a little distance to grow up between them.

"What in hades is all this about—Lacey's blah about this mythical Nelson cuss, and wanting me to pump old Lee?" Pete murmured.

"Search me—but trust Lacey," Dal muttered cautiously. "He's smelt something rotten in Nassau county, and I'm just standing by for orders."

"So am I," mumbled Pete, somewhat disgruntled. "But I'd like to know what all the lying's about."

THERE was nobody in sight around the hangars to inform them when they arrived, for apparently everyone but Lacey and a solitary mechanic had departed.

The mechanic was toiling over the old touring car owned by the partners, aided by the dim illumination of a flashlight. Lacey walked impa-

tiently back and forth near the car, thrashing his hands against his chest occasionally to dispel the growing cold.

"The motor's as balky as a thirsty mule, but we have hopes," he greeted Lee and Froule. "This breeze makes waiting chilly out here; won't you come into the office for a minute or two?"

Froule assented somewhat ungraciously, and Lacey led the way. Pete and Dal followed uncertainly, but as Lacey opened the door and stood aside to permit his guests to precede him, he stealthily signaled to his two partners to sheer off.

Once inside the shack Lacey lighted a kerosene heater and then excused himself on the ground that he must return to speed up the mechanic.

He found Pete Hendron and Dal Cochran beside the car, silently watching an embarrassed mechanic, who did not seem to be doing anything but tightening and loosening spark plugs.

"Keep at it, Jim," Lacey said briskly, and motioned to the two pilots to follow him to the seclusion of a hangar.

In the gloom within Pete and Dal were startled to find Big Bill Hostetter, and Lansing and Sturgis, all obviously waiting for something to occur. Lacey's partners gazed at each other with mystified eyes, but Lacey gave them no time for questions.

"What did you find out?" he demanded of Pete. Hendron swiftly related all that Lee had said.

"Froule is Lee's backer, eh?"

The field superintendent and chief brain worker spoke thoughtfully and fumbled for his packet of cigarettes.

"And Lee is feeling down-hearted. Think he is straight?"

"Lee? Straight as a string," Pete answered positively.

"So do I," Lacey agreed, and violated one of his own most rigid rules by lighting a cigarette in the hangar. "But he ought to have a nurse."

He pondered. "Pete, you and Dal must go back to the office and keep those two there for a while," he said at last. "String them along. Be entertaining if you have to strain your cerebrums. Tell 'em the car will be ready in just a minute. Keep on telling 'em that. I've got to have time to talk to Bill and these boys here."

"What's the matter with that car, anyhow?" inquired Pete.

"Nothing," chuckled Lacey. "This is just the *entr'acte*—five minutes needed to set the stage."

AND he swung about and entered into low-voiced, imperative conversation with the other pilots. Pete and Dal, more wondering than ever, left the hangar and walked over to the office where Froule was already pacing the floor.

It was not until Pete and Dal had exhausted their conversational powers and Froule had suggested for the second time that he telephone for another car that Lacey arrived.

"All ready, gentlemen," he announced, and conducted them out into the early darkness of autumn. "I regret the delay, but you know mechanics have no sense of time. You left the big ship all locked up tight for the night?"

"Yes," Froule said, moving close behind Lacey toward the car, "I locked it up myself."

"Good lock, I hope," Lacey flung over his shoulder.

"We rented the hangar and there was one already on it," Froule replied curtly.

Lacey stopped so suddenly that Froule blundered into him.

"Good Lord! You didn't use that old hunk of scrap metal that was on the stable, did you?" he exclaimed.

"Why, that thing's no good. It could be opened with a bit of wire."

"But there is little or no danger of anyone tampering with it?" Mr. Lee asked, slightly apprehensive.

"There isn't?" Lacey exclaimed. "Don't you read the newspapers? Didn't you hear about that plane that was stolen two weeks ago from this field? Haven't you read of the other attempts?"

Lee looked bewildered; Froule scowled thoughtfully. "Who would try to steal a plane from—" he began.

"Bootleggers!" Lacey declared. "Planes, you know, are costly things, but very useful for hopping over the guards on the Canadian border. These fellows steal a plane with the aid of some down-and-out pilot, carry booze in it until it crashes or goes wrong mechanically, and then grab another.

"It's the easiest and cheapest way to bring liquor in. I would strongly advise that you get a good lock. And I presume you turned on that little red switch near the light switch in the hangar?"

"I didn't," Froule growled. "I didn't see any."

"All the hangars have 'em now," Lacey explained. "When it's on a gong rings in the watchman's shack if anyone opens the door. You'd better—or I——" his voice trailed off meditatively.

"Most certainly we must get a lock, and turn on the signal switch," Lee asserted. "We'll take no chance of having the plane stolen. Where can——?"

"I'll tell you," Lacey said briskly. "I'll run one of you up to a hardware store and back to the hangar if you like. The other I'll drop at the hotel, Or if you like, I'll lock——"

"Never mind, thanks," Froule interrupted curtly. "I'll get the lock, if you don't mind driving me to town and back."

"A pleasure," Lacey murmured, and walked on toward the car.

"She'll run like a Liberty motor now," he assured them, as they climbed in.

He switched on her lights, which cut a swathe of light in the darkness that by now had descended upon the field, and an instant later the car rattled violently and started toward town.

Lacey drove first to the hotel where the two men were registered, and there they left Lee. Then he swung the car into the main street, assisted Froule to purchase a stout padlock, and hurried him back to the field.

"We can drive right up to the hangar," he said. "The edge of the field's smooth enough for a car, and I know the ground pretty well."

FROULE grunted. This ride through the chill black night in an open car had not improved his temper.

Lacey, quite unmoved by the other man's obvious desire to get back to his hotel, calmly halted the car in front of his own hangars, blandly and briefly apologized to Froule for this new delay, and ran to the office shack. Pete and Dal were inside, as he had hoped. They halted their discussion of their partner's idiosyncrasy abruptly.

"Boys, please grab a taxi somehow and jerk Lee from the hotel," he said swiftly. "Keep him here until you see the lights go on in that hangar where his ship is. If the hangar stays dark tell him I must be drunk or crazy to have sent you to bring him back here."

He paused for an instant to let this sink in, then added swiftly:

"But I have a hunch, boys, that they will go on!"

With which cryptic remark he popped out the door again and trotted to the car.

A few moments later Lacey

brought the ancient machine to a squeaking halt in front of the hangar.

"Motor's still cold," he told Froule. "Guess I'll let it run hard for a few minutes."

He opened the throttle full and the noise of the rickety old engine filled the night.

Froule got out and moved toward the door. Lacey kept close to his side. "Hello!" the pilot exclaimed suddenly. "The other lock's gone!"

As he spoke, he raised the latch and pushed back the great sliding door. Out of the black orifice three dim forms, huge in the darkness, catapulted.

Two flung themselves upon Froule, and before the man could utter a bellow they had dragged him inside. Lacey, writhing artistically in the grasp of another, followed, and the door was slammed shut again.

"Who in hell is dis?" demanded the biggest of the trio, as he shook Froule heartily.

This ruffian was a man of about the size of Big Bill Hostetter, and his voice had a muffled note. He was clad in a mackinaw, the collar of which came up high on his cheeks and above his ears.

His face was further concealed by a visored cap pulled well down over his nose. Clothes likewise muffled the visages of his followers, and the only light in the big shed was a smoking lantern.

"Dunno who he is, boss," one of the strangers answered the big man's query. "Hijacker, maybe."

"Whatcha come sneakin about a airplane shed at this time o' night?" indignantly demanded the tall leader of the hard-breathing Froule.

He laid hold of Lee's financial backer and shook him again to emphasize the question-mark.

"We—we came to lock up the hangar," replied Froule.

He cast a despairing glance at Lacey. The pilot, clutching one side of his head, where he had—apparently—been struck by a blunt instrument, did not look like a real source of help.

"You own dis airplane, do yah?" demanded the leader, poking Froule's solar plexus with a finger as stiff as a crowbar. "Kin ya fly it?"

To his followers he added over his shoulder:

"Maybe we won't have to wait no more for dat bum Schmiddy. He's likely too damn stewed to fly it anyhow by now. It's gittin risky around here, wid dese guys walkin' in on us. Kin yah fly it?"

Again the iron finger probed Froule.

"No!" replied his captive emphatically.

He seemed suddenly to shudder. The finger remained poised, pointing like a gun at his stomach, and he struggled uneasily.

Then, abruptly, he stopped. He darted a quick, enigmatic glance at Lacey, which the pilot, though watching him intently, could make nothing of.

FROULE'S eyes hastily turned from Lacey, when he perceived the pilot was watching him. To the bootlegger who stood before him he whispered, "*He* can!"

Lacey caught the words.

"You fool!" he exclaimed, his voice pitched high with condemnation. "What did you tell him that for?"

Froule was silent, but now there seemed to be a gleam of malice in his eye. He no longer struggled.

The big bootleg chief turned his back on Froule and concentrated all his attention on Lacey Tremaine.

"Yah kin fly it, like he says?"

"I can't!" retorted Lacey sullenly.

The big finger seemed to jab at his vitals. His voice rose suddenly to a wail.

"I mean I can't fly it at night—in the dark. Please!"

The finger ceased to jab.

"Yah kin fly it all right, bo. Even that drunk Schmiddy kin fly at night when he knows the field. I been wid him a coupla times. An' we'll have lights for ya at the udder end—never mind where dat is."

"For the love of God," said Lacey Tremaine to Froule, in a voice that trembled in its intensity, "tell him I've never tried to fly this plane—that I couldn't for the first time on a night like this. We'd crash—I'd be killed."

The big ruffian looked around at Froule.

The backer of Lee, standing with one arm twisted behind his back by one of the bootleggers, glanced sideways first at Lacey, then at the big ruffian.

"Tell him! Lacey pleaded.

"How about it, you?" demanded the leader harshly. "I don't wanta git killed."

"He could fly it safely, if he wanted to," Froule replied, his voice seemingly reluctant.

"You — you ——" Lacey began, glaring at Froule.

"Shut up!" commanded the bootlegger. "Yer gonna fly it, and we're gonna risk our necks wit' yah. If yah won't"—he stuck his shrouded countenance at Lacey like a striking snake—"I'll make a gasoline torch out of yah. Git ready!"

He opened the door of the cargo compartment of the plane and peered in.

"Say!"

He whirled about, struck by a sudden thought. The commanding finger pointed at Froule.

"Tie dat guy up an' stick him in here. I ain't gonna leave him behind to split on us."

Froule, with a roar of protest, jerked his arm free from behind his back, but the two smaller thugs were upon him in an instant and pinned him down.

They bound him with ropes, disregarding his outcry, and finally when the big leader came and stood over him he ceased to shout, and began to speak intelligibly.

"Don't take me with you," he begged. "I won't give the alarm. Please! You can gag me and leave me here."

"Aw, a little ride won't hurt yah, feller," the bootlegger scoffed. "Dry dem tears or I'll wipe 'em off wit' sandpaper. You!" The finger indicated Lacey. "Git her ready!"

The pilot turned slowly toward the plane. His movement caused a renewed outburst from Froule. Raising his head as far from the floor as his bonds would permit, he screamed:

"Don't try it, Tremaine!"

Lacey turned. His mood apparently had changed.

"Why not?" he asked, almost optimistically. "I'd rather risk a night flight than have this gentleman pour gasoline over me and set it alight. I'm sure he'll let us go when we land."

Froule struggled spasmodically, bringing into play every ounce of energy he possessed. His eyes were alight with terror.

"Sure I'll let youse both go," promised the bootlegger leader, quite amiably.

He moved over to the plane again and opened the door of the cargo compartment.

"I never bumped off a guy yet wit'out no good reason. Throw dat lad"—he leveled his finger at Froule—"in here. Tap him wit' a wrench if he yells."

THE two followers obediently lifted Froule by shoulders and feet. But despite the ropes that bound him, he managed to kick his feet out of the grasp of the man who held them.

"Wait!" he gasped, and the intensity of his tone was such that his two bearers halted irresolutely and looked at their leader. "I tell you it's sure death to fly in that plane. It—it's out of order!"

The big bootlegger laughed uproariously.

"Yeah?" he shouted. "Now lemme tell one!"

"You must believe me!" Froule insisted, his voice tremulous with fear and with eagerness to convince. "That ship would crash before it got to the edge of the field."

Half convinced by this, the leader turned and stared at the great twin-motored craft. In the dim light the planes loomed like the wings of some fabulous bird.

"I don't see nuttin' wrong wit' it," he insisted, after fifteen seconds of inspection. "Don't think yah kin kid me, guy. Git busy, there, Mr. Aviator."

"You'll have to roll the doors back and get that car out of the way," Lacey said in a non-committal voice, as he climbed to the pilot's seat.

"Shove dat squeaker in!" the bootlegger commanded and halted his followers to deposit Froule inside the ship. "We don't want him yellin' his head off when we open dem shed doors."

"Tremaine! Tremaine!" wailed Froule, as he was borne, twisting but helpless, toward the cargo compartment. "For God's sake look at that lower right wing! There's a tiny slit in the linen on the under side."

"Wait a minute!" the big bootlegger commanded, and halted his men beside the plane.

Froule had stopped talking, sheer terror paralyzing his voice as his body had been brought alongside the ship, but at this respite he gulped and went on:

"Tear the linen there! You'll find the retractor gear inside has been jammed and the wing's been weakened. My mechanic did it!" He struggled feverishly to get further from the plane. "The wing will collapse in the air!"

He ceased to speak, with a gasp, as his strength left him. In the hands of his captors he sagged to the floor of the hangar.

Lacey Tremaine climbed down from the pilot's cockpit and strode over to the right wing tip. Bending, and exerting all his strength, with fingers inserted in the slit, he ripped the fabric. His inspection took only an instant, but his face was stern and set when he turned from the plane.

There was a silence in the hangar.

Lacey was the first to recover. He walked toward the big bootlegger, who was still staring, transfixed, at Froule. With great warmth the pilot shook the ruffian's hand. His voice was nonchalant once more:

"Bill, you did it perfectly. You're an actor, not a pilot! But you can take off that cap and turn down your mack, now. The play is over."

The chief of the bootleggers slowly shook back the collar that had concealed his features—the features of Big Bill Hostetter. One of the men snapped on the electric light, and the flooding radiance revealed to Froule that the other bootleggers were Sturgis and Lansing.

A choked, startled cry came from the man who had convicted himself.

Big Bill was still gazing horror-struck at Lee's financial backer.

"This—this snake knew that ship would crash!" he said slowly, almost unbelievingly. "He wrecked it—planned murder!"

"Not murder!" shrieked Froule. "It only meant a little fall!"

No one paid him the least attention. They knew well what wing failure usually meant.

"What did he do it for?" asked Sturgis blankly. "I don't see, yet, what it's all about, Lacey."

LACEY Tremaine shook the last cigarette out of his packet, but before he lighted it his eye passed almost affectionately over the trim lines of the big cargo ship he had saved from destruction.

"We'll postpone a complete explanation until Lee gets here," Lacey said. "That won't be long, for Pete and Dal are bringing him.

"But here's the gist of it: A man like Froule doesn't offer a thousand dollars to test-hop a ship when he can get it done for a hundred. And a man doesn't lie like a crook if he isn't one. Froule lied. I knew something was wrong. I invented Nelson to delay the flight while I dug up the dirty work."

"That thousand sort of blinded us," Big Bill admitted. "Why did he offer so much?"

"Because Lee insisted. You all know Lee—an able aeronautical designer—and a gentleman. He told Pete two ships like this had crashed. He thought there was some inherent defect in his invention that he couldn't set his finger on. So he demanded that the pilot who took a chance should be warned and adequately compensated. Froule had to agree."

"But what was Froule's game?"

"I can just guess, but I think I can guess right. Froule knew this wing-retracting device was a big thing—a revolutionary thing in aviation. There was money enough for both in it, but he wasn't square. He was cheating Lee; I assumed that when I detected his lying.

"But how? I don't mind admitting that the question nearly put permanent waves in my forehead. However, Pete learned from Lee, who's a great man in his line, but a baby in business, that he'd blown his last cent in constructing planes that went wrong. And Froule had lent him more to build this ship.

"If this one crashed Lee would be utterly ruined, and certainly discouraged. He would have to drop his invention.

"Then it would be easy for Froule to take the patents off his hands in part payment of all the money he had sunk. Perhaps he planned to give poor Lee a bit of cash for them. But to hog it, he was determined. There was big money in it!"

Lacey whirled about suddenly and confronted Froule.

"How much money was there in it? he asked with deadly intensity. "Enough to save your conscience for the death or serious injury of the one of us who tested this doctored ship? How much was the mechanic to get who did the job on the wing after you'd sent Lee's men away?

"Answer those questions and then tell me how the other two crashes occurred. Did anyone die in them? Was that mechanic of yours first out on the field to do away with the traces of dirty work when they fell?"

Froule got to his feet, snarling as if he had been lashed.

"You'll have a nice time convicting me," he sneered. "I've got lots of money back of me, and this numbo-jumbo acting of yours won't sound real in court."

It was the only answer he could make, for he stood there before them, convicted by his own fear, a skulking assassin.

"Is that right, Lacey?" young Lansing asked suddenly. "Would it be hard to put him in jail?"

Lacey Tremaine answered:

"He hasn't committed the crime; he's only planned it, and it will be hard to find that accomplice."

"Then keep him here until morning and then turn him over to me," Lansing said sternly. "He's a coward. I'll make him suffer in imagination what one of us would have undergone in reality."

There was a silence in the hangar. Froule, not sensing the meaning of the words, looked from one face to another. Lansing was the star stunt pilot and acrobatic flier of the field.

"That's justice," Lacey decided soberly. "We'll give this fellow such a taste of flying that aviation will be rid of him forever. He'll never dare *speak* of a plane again."

WITH the first light of the red dawn two airplanes were rolled out upon Burrage Field, one for a test that was certain to be successful; the other to impose a punishment that was inadequate for the crime.

The first was the giant two-engined cargo plane, with wing and retractor gear carefully repaired; the second the swift two-seater in which young Lansing was to give Froule some slight idea of the fate he had deliberately planned for other men.

The treacherous promoter seemingly had recovered his nerve. During the hours that the pilots had labored on the weakened wing, he had sat in a corner of the hangar, staring at them with evil, baffled eyes. And when Lansing left the others to get his stunt ship, he bared his teeth in a contemptuous smile.

Lacey Tremaine ached to erase that mocking grimace with a swing of his fist, but Froule was the cowardly type a man could not hit and retain his self-respect. He was immune from both legal and physical punishment, and in his defeat he took malicious joy in that fact.

The pilots kept him in the hangar while the motors of both planes were warmed up. Then, at a word of command, Froule arose readily enough and walked between Big Bill Hostetter and Dal Cochran out to the line. The silent flying men stood in a group, watching with stern faces.

At the sight of the tiny biplane, stubby of wing and powerful of motor, that thundered beside the huge cargo ship, Froule's self-possession suddenly deserted him. For an instant he stared at the fragile craft, its whole fabric quivering under the throb of the roaring motor.

His eyes dwelt with fascinated horror on the blurred, flickering propeller that cut the air in front of the machine like a keen, two-ended simitar. From its varnished surface was reflected the blood-red color of the rising sun.

And wing to wing with it, the machine he had plotted against loomed stark and spare in the morning light. Its twin motors added their clamor to the vengeful uproar.

From the rear cockpit of his ship young Lansing, grim of countenance, extended to Froule a leather helmet. With a shriek of pure terror the crooked promoter shrank away from the plane; then whirled about and bolted, blind as a runaway horse, from that sinister-looking machine.

There was a chorus of warning shouts from the pilots, and Lacey Tremaine made a desperate dive for the man, but he was too late.

Froule's wild rush carried him straight into the almost invisible sweep of the right propeller of Lee's machine. There was not a perceptible hesitation of the heavy blades, but for an instant they gleamed redder than the glow of the rising sun would explain.

And beneath the great cargo airplane dropped what remained of Froule. A sterner penalty than the pilots had decreed had been imposed by the machine upon the man who had planned its destruction.

The Best Of Intentions

By J. FRANCIS KING

HENRY HERBERT ("SLIM") HAYES was a gentleman of leisure. Work, to Henry's way of thinking, was something with which no true gentleman should affiliate himself. It was invented solely for the ignorant—something to keep their dull minds and hoary hands occupied so as to keep them out of mischief. And Henry was far from ignorant—he was, if anything, too sophisticated.

How could it be otherwise with a man who had lived by his wits for as long as he could remember? And Henry's hands were anything but hoary. He prided himself on possessing a pair of hands—slender, shapely, and well taken care of—that often brought pangs of envy to fine ladies in the manicure shop he patronized.

So it can readily be understood that Henry's aversion to work was deep-founded. That is, of course, in regard to work, either physical or mental, as the lower classes of people understood it.

For even Henry worked, though his "work" was performed while most true gentlemen slumbered, and occupied not more than an hour or two of his valuable time per week. For Henry happened to be one of the cloverest "prowlers" that ever rifled a flat in the "Big Town."

But this occupation, to him, was not looked upon as being in any way affiliated with work. It was an *art.* And in his own line he was an artist, and recognized by the gentry of the world in which he moved as one of its brainiest members.

He attributed his long success mostly to the fact that he had always "worked" alone. Then, too, he always, before tackling a job, knew every inch of the premises where he was to work. Wine and women had hardly entered his life, for he knew that a man could not successfully mix these two factors with such a profession as he followed. So he gave both a very wide berth, so to speak.

Henry was twenty-eight and traveling along very nicely, "sitting pretty," to use his own expression, when he met Lulu Cameron, a manicurist who worked in the shop he patronized.

Although she had been there several months and had often cast admiring glances in Henry's direction when he entered the shop every other day, he had never given her a second look until the day she had first manicured his nails, when his regular manicurist was not among those present.

Lulu could best be described as being beautiful but dumb—that is, if a beauty specialist had worked over

her face, adding a trifle to her too tip-tilted nose, making her too generous mouth a trifle less generous, and molding her chin a bit more firmly.

But it must be admitted, and even at first sight was admitted by Henry, that her large, guileless gray-blue eyes were truly beautiful. And her eyes were really the first part of her that Henry noticed as he entered the shop and found her seated at the table where *his* manicurist belonged.

He managed a really stern frown as he beheld her, for he knew he appeared most handsome just that way. But Lulu just turned her thousand-volt innocent lamps on him and smiled. Henry's frown gradually disappeared. What eyes! He was smiling broadly as he seated himself.

"New girl?" he asked politely.

"Why, no," was the sweet reply, somewhat crestfallen, to be sure. "Miss Layden got married this morning, and I'm taking her place."

"Hm! For good?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so—until I get married or fired." And Lulu giggled.

Henry gave her a rather questioning look and, as she started to work, remarked rather sarcastically: "Yep. The girls all look forward to finding a meal ticket, I suppose?"

"Meal ticket?" f r o w n e d Lulu, "but *I* didn't say anything about being *hungry*."

"By 'meal ticket' I mean a *husband*," explained Henry.

"Oh! Oh-h! I'm sorry I misunderstood you."

Then and there Henry made a mental note to the effect that, though this sweet sister was quite a looker, she was by no means an intellectual giant.

"My, what beautiful hands you have, Mr.—er—Mr.——"

"Hayes," supplied the pleased one. "Henry H e r b e r t Hayes—Henry to my friends. And you?"

"Lulu Cameron," she replied and giggled. "And Lulu to *my* friends."

"Well, Lulu, I can see right now that you and I are going to be friends. It isn't often I 'fall,'" explained Henry, "but are you, by any chance, free tonight?"

"Free? Why—why——"

"To be more explicit," interrupted Henry, "how would you like to step out to a good show with me tonight?"

"Oh, Henry," she blushingly answered, "that would be *mar*-velous!"

And, gazing like a stricken calf into those wonderful gray-blue orbs, Henry knew in his heart that it would be just that.

THAT was the start of our hero's finish so far as giving the shorter-haired sex a wide berth was concerned. He just could not help himself. And it was not exactly love at first sight, on his part, at least. For the more he saw of her, and he took her out to shows, dinners, and the like at least four times a week thereafter, the more he loved her.

She was so *innocent!* And she'd been living in the "Big Town" more than five years when Henry met her. He couldn't account for her lack of sophistication—except when he told himself she was one in a million and that, being as good as fine gold, she just *had* to be that way.

Gradually Lulu began to change Henry's life. Being out with her so often, it just naturally followed that, playing the good fellow, he should take an occasional drink of wine when they visited the resorts which as yet had managed to keep their doors unpadlocked. And the

more deeply he fell in love, the less brilliant was his wonderful art made to appear. For to Lulu he represented himself to be a first-class salesman for an up-and-coming automobile concern.

After the first two months of rushing Lulu, Henry began to take stock of himself and his possessions. He had been showing her good times without number, and such good times were a bit costly. Also he had been lavishing gifts, mostly jewelry, upon her. For Lulu, above all else, positively *adored* jewelry. But although Henry told himself time and again that he was a "chump" to be cavorting himself in such a manner over any frill, he continued to lavish such gifts upon her. Those innocent eyes just drove him wild.

But Henry, though "sitting pretty" when he met her, and though a more than ordinarily successful and prosperous prowler, was no butter-and-egg man. When he took stock of his possessions, he found that he had left about six thousand iron-men in his safe-deposit box and several thousand in gilt-edge securities. And he was seriously contemplating a trip to the altar!

Well, he decided, he'd have to do something real soon to make such a trip financially possible. For Henry was no piker. He'd do the thing right or not at all. He hated to turn to the profession which he'd forsaken since he'd met Lulu to obtain the "necessary." And after much pondering over the problem he decided he'd have a whirl at the ponies to bolster up his fast-diminishing bank account.

Woeful the day he made such a decision. In three weeks his capital was reduced to six hundred in place of six thousand, though he still had the securities. This led him into considering that which he hated most fervently—manual labor. And it took him a whole week to make up his mind and gather together the necessary courage to go to work. But it only took five days in the capacity of taxi driver to prove to him that no true gentleman should work.

So he drifted back at the old profession—playing just as close and safe as he knew how—for he now knew that if he took a "fall" it would mean the end of this courtship of one who was now more than life itself to him.

MEANWHILE, though Henry knew that beauty and brains were seldom found in one feminine head, he began to deplore Lulu's utter lack of the latter. It might, eventually, cause him embarrassment—or worse. Witness, for instance, the way she had been seized with a fit of giggles during a more or less dramatic moment at the last show they had viewed together.

It had almost caused their ejection from the house. And when, on their way home that night he had rebuked her, she had said in her naive way, "Oh, Henry, I just couldn't help it when he (the leading man) said, 'You cur, you haven't the backbone of a jelly fish!' Think of anyone having such a backbone, Henry." And the giggle rippled forth once more.

Then there was that last diamond brooch he had given her. He had expressly asked her, for certain very good reasons of his own, not to wear it for at least two weeks, telling her that some thief might steal it.

The following day when he visited the manicure shop, as he now was in the habit of doing daily, the first thing that confronted his eyes was this very same brooch. Henry automatically looked over his shoulder, really expecting to see a guardian of the law on his trail. To get it back from her he had to tell her he want-

ed to have it appraised by a jeweler. That was the last she saw of it.

The last little act of hers which convinced him that she was absolutely—no, he wouldn't say *dumb*—but, w e l l, altogether unsophisticated, had happened only a few days before. While s t r o l l i n g down Eighth Avenue, arm in arm, Henry, in passing a hat store, became cognizant of his urgent need of a new cap, as there was a little job in sight and he had lost the cap he had for use on such occasions a few nights previous while making a hasty retreat, after having accidentally set off a burglar alarm.

Lulu accompanied him into the store. Henry soon found just the cap he needed—of dark material and having a large peak. After having made the purchase he began to look around to see if there wasn't something else on display that he might need. While he was thus engaged, Lulu took the cap from the counter, smiled at and whispered to the clerk, and was escorted by him to the machine used to stencil initials on sweatbands of hats.

When Henry, a few minutes later, returned to the counter the first thing to meet his eyes was his own initials punched in the sweatband of his new cap. Lulu, giggling, was positively unaware of the wild impulse to crown her which very nearly conquered her boy friend.

"I suppose *you* did that?" said Henry quite icily.

"Yes, Henry," she replied. "Isn't it *mar*-vel-ous?"

Henry groaned. Well, he'd come back to the shop later, alone, and get another cap just like it. For, though he was scrupulously careful while at work, he had lost not one, but a dozen caps, while making his getaways when by accident he had given some kind of an alarm. He just couldn't go through a window on the fly and keep his hat. And, being that his initials were so uncommon, he knew only too well that to have them printed in a cap he wore while on a job was to sign his passport to Sing Sing. The following day he bought another cap of like kind.

So Henry deplored the fact that beauty and brains seemed to be incompatible in women; and that, though she was otherwise perfect, Lulu was just a trifle too unsophisticated. And only last night he had, and in no uncertain terms, told her so. Result—their first quarrel, a flood of tears from Lulu, and a slammed door as Henry flung himself out of her house.

WE find Henry in his apartment in the West Fifties drinking his cares away, the night following their quarrel. The more he drinks, the stronger does he become convinced that the best way to make up with Lulu is to marry her. But Henry is no piker! *And* he's far from being a millionaire.

Another stiff jolt of hootch brings to his mind a "job" that he has, for more than a week, had his eye on. That job is the coup that will make marriage possible. And marriage is now his supreme desire.

Henry is not exactly intoxicated. He seldom gets that way. Neither is he sober. He just has that "rarin'-to-go" feeling which several shocks of bootleg will bring about. Glancing at his watch, he finds the hour ten-fifteen. The proper time for the job to be pulled should be midnight! Well, why not tackle the job an hour ahead of schedule? And, if the loot proved to be what he expected, he'd have a litle present for his little sweetheart. Another drink. Yes—he'd give her the whole d—d lot of it, only (he smiled) even *she* might get suspicious.

Rising to his feet, he brushed his initialless cap to the floor, unnoticed. Strapping his kit of burglar tools about his body, he prepared to leave. Where the h——l is his cap? Ha, ha! He thought he'd thrown it on the table, and there it was on the mantelpiece. That hootch made him that way. Well, he'd be fully sober as soon as he got a little air.

Half an hour later we see a well-dressed figure swaggering down a street in the upper Fifties between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. He passes down the street to Ninth Avenue on the south side of the street. Pausing only to light a cigarette and glance about him as he reaches the corner, he crosses the street and strolls leisurely back toward Eighth.

He stops when half-way up the block, throws away his cigarette and enters a modern apartment house, after but a few seconds' fumbling with his keys. Once inside the door, he proceeds to the rear of the hall, again fumbles with his keys for a moment and, opening the rear hall door, steps into the back yard.

Crouched against the wall, he maneuvered to a spot directly below the fire-escape, the bottom rung of which was situated about eight feet from the ground. After listening for a short space, and glancing at the windows in the houses across the yard from him, he crouched very low, took a really fine spring and, a second later, was gliding up the fire-escape.

As he stopped before the window on the third floor he made a mental note to the effect that a light was still burning in the kitchen of the apartment just below him. Have to take pains to be exceptionally careful, he reflected, as he drew on his silk gloves.

Trying the window and finding it locked, he extracted his diamond glass-cutter from his kit and commenced to cut out a triangle-shaped piece of glass just above the window catch. When the cut was almost through the glass he plastered a specially prepared slab of heavy sticking paper across the triangle and pressed inward ever so gently. A very faint crack was heard. Taking out a small, thin file, he slit the paper on one side, located the cut, stuck the thin edge of the file through the crevice and lifted the piece of glass outward, breaking it off and putting it in his pocket.

Reaching through the hole he'd made, he slipped off the window catch, carefully eased the window open, and a moment later was in the kitchen of the apartment. As there wasn't even a semblance of a breeze, he left the window open.

Noiselessly he entered the dining-room and crept to within a few feet of the first bedroom door. Very faintly the sound of deep breathing came to his ears. He crept closer.

Now his eyes were accustomed to the darkness and he perceived the outlines of the dresser in which, if his information was correct, reposed the jewels of Lauretta Lawrence, movie star, who appeared to be sleeping quite soundly. The door to the next bedroom, he could now see, was closed. This, he knew, was the actress's mother's room.

HE stole across the carpeted bedroom floor, fitted a master skeleton key in the keyhole of the door of the adjoining room and locked it.

Taking out his flash, he flashed it, for an instant only, toward the foot of the bed. Miss Lawrence's face was toward the opposite wall. He wouldn't, if he were real careful, even have to chloroform her.

He opened his black silk bag and faced the dresser. His flash blinked for a second, played over the dresser

top, then went out. The jewel box was in plain sight. He fingered lovingly the pearly necklace that reposed in the box. That would be his make-up present to Lulu!

There were two rings. These he dropped, with the necklace, into his bag. Opening the drawers silently, he discovered a brooch and two sets of earrings. Quite a nice little haul, he congratulated himself. Best he had come across in several months.

The sleeping actress moved. He spun around like a flash, ready to spring. For a full minute he stood there tense, every nerve on edge. At the expiration of that time he was convinced that he had nothing to fear, so he pocketed his loot and prepared to leave.

Like a shadow he glided out of the room, across the dining-room, and entered the kitchen. He was half way to the window when a piercing scream rang out. As the second scream rang out he was flying through the window. The top of his head barely scraped the window's bottom and off went his cap. D—m the luck! Another good cap gone! But he was in too great a hurry to try to recover it.

Groundward he slid, almost flying down the ladder. "Help! Thief! Murder!" came to his ears as he reached the bottom rung. As he dropped nimbly to the ground he heard windows above him being slammed open. He had just reached the rear hall door when he heard the ugly bark of a revolver and the whine of a bullet that dug its way into the ground uncomfortably close to him.

In a flash he was through the doorway, through the hall. His getaway had been well planned long in advance, in contemplation of just such a circumstance as his present one. As he flew across the street he heard windows on all sides being opened and cries for help, while more than one police whistle was shrilling its warning cry.

Just before he dove into an alleyway on the opposite side of the street, he perceived a bluecoat turning the corner at the other end of the block, lumbering in his direction. Through the alleyway, into the back yard and over the fence he went.

As he came out on the next street he noted that it was free of pedestrians. He crossed the street, ran a few feet toward Ninth Avenue, entered a hallway and glided up the stairs, taking them nimbly three at a time. Arriving on the roof, he sped over the roof-tops which he knew were of a like height, and toward Ninth Avenue.

A minute or so later he was strolling across the avenue. He turned in at the next block, worked his way toward Tenth Avenue, stopped to buy a cap in a near-by second-hand store, and was soon entering the habitat of one of his pals.

Here, finding his pal's rooms vacant, he "cleaned" himself, as was his custom immediately after having pulled a job. Placing his kit of tools in the trap in the kitchen floor, he took out the silk bag containing the loot and examined its contents.

The necklace was a beauty. Just the thing for Lulu, he reflected. Placing the necklace in his pocket, he dropped the bag in the trap and closed the door. His watch read 11:25.

A HALF-HOUR later, after five minutes of bell-ringing, he was admitted to his sweetheart's apartment.

"Oh, Henry," cried Lulu, flinging her arms about him, "I was just dreaming that you were drowning."

Breaking loose from the embrace, he was just in the act of taking out the necklace when her mother, from

the next room, demanded to know who the midnight caller was. When informed, she grunted something to the effect that it wasn't done in *her* day and ordered her daughter to "make it short."

"Brought a present for you, sweetie," said Henry, taking out the necklace and handing it to her.

"Oh, *Henry,*" she crooned, as she fingered it. "Isn't it *mar*——"

"Yeh!" cut in her lover. That word was getting on his nerves. "Now that we're O. K. again, what do you say if we get spliced real soon?"

"Oh, Henry, I've been thinking of that ever so long," was her blushing rejoinder. "It would be just *mar*——"

"Henry," she gurgled when he came up for air, "you've been drinking again!"

"Just a couple of drops, honey. Now, listen. I wouldn't wear that necklace for a couple of weeks. Save it for the wedding. See? Some crook is li'ble to gyp it on you. There's the old woman squawking again. Let's clinch and call it a night."

They did.

HENRY was ready to start on his daily trip to the manicure shop the following morning when, answering a knock on his door, two detectives, only too well known to him, entered his apartment.

"What's this?" queried Henry.

"Just come to escort you down to headquarters," explained Detective Carroll, who had long been on our hero's trail. "Chief wants to confer with you."

The other officer stepped to Henry's side and "fanned him" for weapons. Vain search!

"What's the big idea?" growled Henry. "What are you trying to hang onto me now, Carroll?"

"Maybe I want to sell you a cap with three h's in it," sarcastically replied the detective. "An' maybe you're going on a *short* ride that'll be a *long* vacation, get me?"

Henry's heart was doing gymnastics. Nevertheless, his facial features registered well-simulated surprise, then anger. "An' maybe I ain't, Mr. Wise Guy, 'cause you couldn't sell *me* the time; get me?"

"Right," returned the detective. "I ain't peddling time. But I know a judge who's *givin'* it away, an' I got a heavy hunch this judge'll donate quite a load of it to a certain hatless prowler who's list'nin' in on my little speech right now. Let's go!"

They went.

HENRY was on fairly good terms with the Chief. He soon learned that the only evidence against him was the initialed cap he'd lost the previous night, and he knew that the cap couldn't be traced as belonging to him.

A short third degree elicited no incriminating information from him. Third degrees happened in Henry's life on an average of a dozen times a year.

At noon he communicated with his lawyer. They agreed that the case was a joke, yet Henry was denied bail. His paramount worry was Lulu. So he had the lawyer call her up that afternoon and tell her of his whereabouts, warning her not to visit her sweetheart under any conditions. For Henry knew that his goose would be cooked if Lulu came within a mile of him.

"Oh, but I can at least write to him, can't I?" asked Lulu.

The lawyer hesitated. Knowing Henry as he did, he felt confident that he could not have divulged his

business to Lulu. Henry was too brainy for that. He didn't want her to visit him solely because of the trouble she would be made to go through, cross-examinations and the like. So reasoned the lawyer.

"Yes, I guess it'll be all right for you to write. I'll have him on the street in a week, though, as I know he's innocent. Good-by."

That night Lulu read the newspapers. Among the articles listed as having been stolen by her lover was the diamond necklace, valued at fifteen thousand dollars. Lulu gasped, cried for an hour, pondered over the situation for a longer period of time and decided she'd secure her sweetheart's liberty, even though the cost would be a great sacrifice on her part.

The following morning, bright and early, a messenger boy trotted into police headquarters with a package and letter addressed to Henry Herbert Hayes. Opening the letter first, the Chief read:

HENRY DEAR:

Your lawyer told me I could write to you. Oh, Henry, I feel so miserable to think that you did such a thing, and all for me. I know now that you really and truly love me and that you stole the jewels to give to me and to enable us to get married.

Henry, dear, it was just marvelous. You know I adore jewels. But I want *you* more than all the jewels in the world. And so I am sending you back the necklace you gave me, with this letter, so that you can give it back to that darned actress and be free. I know the minute you give it back you'll be able to come back to me. And we'll be married *right away*.

I'm not going to work today, dear. I'm going to sit right here and wait for you to come for me. Oh, Henry, though I know you'll be here in a few hours I can hardly wait that long. So hurry, dear.

From your loving, true sweetheart,
LULU.

Henry got five years.

Next, Please!

An American lady went into a London hairdresser's for a shampoo and wave and as the establishment was full was asked if she would wait. She went into one of the cubicles and sat down.

After a little, a red-haired girl came in and performed the necessary operations. When the American went to the desk to pay, the proprietor ran forward and asked her to wait a little longer. An assistant would be free in a moment.

The astonished lady said she had had her hair done by his red-haired barberess. The proprietor seemed aghast and said he apologized for doubting the lady's word, but wasn't she making a mistake?

"Mistake nothing, look at my hair!" said the customer, showing her hair newly waved and still moist. The proprietor with a queer look, took her money and let her go. As she came out another customer followed her. "Excuse me, did you say you had your hair done by a red-haired girl?"

"Why, yes!" said the American lady, describing the girl. The other woman gasped.

"Why, my dear," she managed to ejaculate in a horrified whisper, "That girl cut her throat three weeks ago in that very cubicle."

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How a *Faux Pas* Made Me Popular

I never knew it was so easy to be popular until a humiliating experience showed me the secret

THE day I met Grace we went swimming. There was another chap along — Harry something — a dapper, grinning fellow with his hair slicked back. He was awkward in the water and his bathing suit hung about him like a wet sack. I didn't see how Grace could stand him.

My Fatal Mistake

That night at the hotel dance I learned a lesson. The first couple that caught my eye was Grace and Harry—but what a different Harry! His slick hair and dapper manner seemed to fit the picture perfectly. And how easily—how faultlessly he danced!

"Aren't you going to ask me to dance?" Grace called gaily to me.

I flushed, realizing I couldn't dance a step. "Why, I—I'd love to, but——"

"All right," Grace broke in, "the next dance is yours."

Before I could speak the orchestra started to play—a dreamy oriental tune. Grace stood waiting. I could feel Harry's smirking eyes on me. I made a wild stab. "I'm sorry—but I can't tango."

"That's a waltz!" Grace laughed.

"I don't waltz either," I faltered, realizing I had made a faux pas—a blunder.

"I don't think you want to dance with me at all," she flashed. Before I could explain further, she and Harry had glided away. I stumbled out of the ball room. Grace's last words—"I'll never speak to you again!" were ringing in my ears.

Why I Never Made Friends

That night I was mighty blue. Why couldn't I make a hit with the girls like the other fellows did? Girls liked me at first but later they went off with fellows who took them dancing. That was my weak point—I could never be popular unless I learned to dance. I had heard of a new way to learn—at home, without music or teacher. Arthur Murray, America's foremost dancing instructor, had perfected this method. I sent for his free booklet and test lesson.

The booklet came promptly and I read it through without stopping. Here was just what I needed. I tried the test lesson and was amazed at the ease with which I was able to master the steps. The lessons were so clear, so simple. I grew confident—eager to dance to music and a real partner.

An Exciting Night

I continued learning so I could attend the coming mask ball at the hotel.

What an exciting night that was! I danced with many partners, keeping perfect time, gliding around the floor like a professional! Midnight found me dancing with a charming creature in a soft, clinging costume.

"Where **did** you learn to dance so divinely?" she murmured. She was masked but her voice thrilled me strangely. Later I told her the whole story—How I met a beautiful girl and lost her in a day—how wretched I felt—how I learned to dance in my own room.

She caught my hand. "Oh, I'm sorry——" Her voice broke—the voice that thrilled me so strangely. I brushed aside her mask. Imagine my wonder—surprise—joy! It was Grace who was smiling up at me!

What wonderful times we had together after that. We went everywhere—parties, balls and dances. No longer was I a gloomy wallflower, envying others. I was throbbing with new life, new popularity, acclaimed as a faultless dancer wherever I went. The day I wrote to Arthur Murray was certainly the luckiest in my life.

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